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THE STATE PRISONER.

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THE  
STATE PRISONER

A TALE

OF

THE FRENCH REGENCY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON  
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WHITING, BEAUFORT HOUSE, STRAND.

## PREFACE.

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IN sending these two volumes forth into the world, the Author would not venture to try the public patience further, by any thing in the shape of a preface, were it not in some degree necessary to explain, that, besides the historical personages introduced, some of the actors on the scene are not altogether imaginary. The general history of Dumont the State Prisoner, his appearance, manners, and character, his imprisonment at Bordeaux, and treatment there, are all derived from information, which fell casually in the author's way; but was confirmed by authority that left no doubt of its accuracy. The date of that extraordinary man's captivity, indeed, has been

changed to suit the purposes of the writer ; but as his ultimate fate was involved in great mystery, as well as every circumstance preceding and following a particular epoch in his life, the Author would not venture to supply from imagination the parts of his story that were wanting, for fear of spoiling, by unskilful additions, a tale which appeared in itself sufficiently interesting. It is more than possible, that the manner in which that tale has been told in these pages, the want of skill, and the want of experience of the writer, may have had the effect of lessening the interest, which the real circumstances originally possessed ; but the consciousness of inability to do justice to the subject, rendered it the more necessary for the Author not to change the events, more than was absolutely necessary to the plan of the work.



THE  
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CHAPTER I.

IT was towards the close of autumn, in the year of our Lord 1718, that a lonely individual sat in the principal apartment of a lonely house in one of the most lonely parts of the road leading from Perigueux to Bordeaux, and at the distance of about twenty or thirty miles from the latter town. The dwelling was one of those large, staring, many-windowed mansions, which are designated as *châteaux*, although the literal translation of the word would not prepare the mind of an untravelled Englishman for any thing so totally deficient in turret, battlement, and drawbridge. Suffice it to say, that the one in question looked as if it had been constructed by bad taste and bad judgment, for the discomfort of man. AN

apology for an avenue, composed of half-naked poplars, led to a *porte cochère*, whose respectable dimensions rendered it the only object calculated to rescue the premises from the contempt of the passing traveller.

The possessor and actual inmate of the chateau was upwards of seventy years of age : but Time, which had silvered his hair, and stiffened his joints, could neither subdue the energy of his disposition, nor chill the warm feelings of his heart. General Louis de Brissac, Governor of Bordeaux, and Commandant of the Fort du Ha, in that town, had been the companion in arms of Condé and Turenne, and had even fought on the same field, with the god of his idolatry, his namesake, and sovereign, Louis the Great. A few years previous to his demise that king had bestowed on his “brave and faithful De Brissac” (whose existence he had long forgotten) the object of his ambition ; and had released him from the active service to which he was no longer equal, by appointing him to the command of the fort Du Ha, a place of some trust, being now used as a prison, more particularly for political delinquents. In De Brissac, the soldier was so closely

bound up with every thought, word, and action, that it became part of his nature. The necessity of military forms, the occasional discharge of cannon, nay, the very sight of uniforms, and the sound of the sentry's challenge, were all sources of pleasure to the veteran, the monotonous calm of whose life was only disturbed by the unfeigned grief which he experienced on the death of Louis, in 1715. His services, and his loyalty, were both continued to the Regent Duke of Orleans, but his enthusiastic admiration, and his unqualified affection, were buried in the grave of Louis the Great.

We would not, by introducing Brissac to our readers at such a distance from Bordeaux, lead any one to suppose that the general had inflicted on himself a voluntary exile from his favourite duties: it was the peremptory commands of his physician, to whom he had long been disobedient, which compelled him to seek change of air, and extorted from him in an unguarded moment, the promise to be absent from the city for a fortnight at least. One week had crawled heavily by; the weather was growing colder; nature was gradually assuming her wintry aspect, and, cursing his fate, his

physician, and himself, the general sat in his large chair, turning his eyes towards the windows. Successive rain-drops were chasing and jostling each other down every pane, as they rattled in the wind, which was at the same time occupied in stripping the poor poplars of their scanty clothing, and whistling round their writhing forms in cruel exultation.

It has often been remarked that such audible demonstrations of the weather's illhumour are conducive to a totally opposite feeling among those who, safely lodged beneath their own roof, laugh the passing hurricane to scorn. This may be the case, when the blazing hearth is encircled by a social barrier, when the storm without only heightens the comfort within, and when every fresh blast is echoed by a burst of merriment. But a similar argument could not be applied to the interior of the chateau, or to the illustration of loneliness in the person of De Brissac. Two unread volumes lay on the table; the one a Treatise on Military Tactics, in which the general was better instructed than the author; the other, an odd volume of some romance of the day, which he occasionally took up and put down, with many a "Pshaw!"

or like expression of contempt. He had not the dreamer's magic power to people his solitude ; he had long passed the age when many an hour is beguiled in the vague enjoyment of castle building, and if he called memory to his assistance, she conjured up a panorama of such stirring and active scenes as only rendered his present seclusion more intolerable.

Our general had not even a dog to share his imprisonment, without we except the inanimate pair that yawned on the hearth, as if vainly requiring their tribute of fire : we say vainly, for this was a luxury the veteran never permitted to himself until the sun had arrived on the confines of Capricornus. It must be confessed he had felt strangely tempted to infringe his own rule, by the reflection that the requisite attendance on the fire would cause the more frequent appearance of the other two inmates of the house, whose occasional visits he now prolonged as well as he was able, by some useless question to his old servant, or some still more uncalled for compliment to the antiquated *gouvernante*.

Unhappy De Brissac, the star of ennui, seemed to culminate ; he rose from his chair.

he paced the room, he tried the gallery, but was sent back shivering to his old quarters. He sang a snatch of an old military "roundel," but his own voice was fearfully loud: he attempted a whistling duet with the wind, but could not keep in tune for the life of him;—when suddenly his practised ear caught the sound of horse's hoofs. At first he dared not believe it, but the metal horseshoe rang too merrily on the pavement of the court to be mistaken, and a ray of hope kindled within his breast.

"If it were my bitterest enemy," he thought, "and I don't know his name, he would be welcome; the sight of the ugliest face, and the sound of the harshest voice would be hailed with joy. Perhaps it is some despatch merely left at the door; but even that might call me to Bordeaux."

The servant entered, and, to the general's unspeakable joy, announced that a gentleman requested shelter during the heavy rain, but that he would not mount the stairs until he had the permission of the master of the house to do so.

"I did not think of letting them in at first," observed the prudent domestic, "but I never



saw a likelier young gentleman, or one that bestrid a horse with better grace; he has a servant, but no baggage, having sent it to Bordeaux by another conveyance."

"And he is waiting below all this time!" cried the eager general. "Tell him how proud I shall be to receive him; then light the fire, throw on an extra log or two on the hearth, and bring the other large tapestried chair out of the gallery."

He was quickly obeyed, and though, as we have before observed, De Brissac was in no fastidious mood, his satisfaction was increased tenfold by the appearance of his guest. He possessed in an eminent degree every outward passport to favour; but the frankness of his address, and the natural grace of his manner, went further towards winning the old man's heart, than the distinguished beauty of his person. He apologized for his want of ceremony, but appealed to the state of the weather, and that of his own garments, to plead his excuse. This they did effectually, for his plain but handsome riding-dress was completely soaked, the scarlet feather that hung from his hat was dripping and discoloured, while the rain that had for some time lodged in his long

hair, now distilled itself through every ringlet. The general, with most paternal care, insisted on his guest immediately changing his damp clothes, and the inevitable merriment which the metamorphose occasioned, when he returned in a somewhat antiquated military costume, that hung loosely round his young and graceful form helped to remove the ceremonious preliminaries of a first introduction.

Established in two fellow chairs, before a blazing wood fire, the general, whose impatience to learn the name of his new friend could brook no delay, and the ardour of whose curiosity was in no wise damped by hearing that he was an Englishman, conceived that the best method to accomplish his end, was to announce himself. He cleared his throat several times, thus gaining a few moments' reflection, as to the manner in which the intelligence should be conveyed. He had half determined on identifying himself with the young officer, who led one of the wings of one of the battalions on the memorable day of —, and who had the singular good fortune to render a slight service to the late lamented monarch. But, on reflection, he judged that his guest might never have heard of the cir-

cumstance, and would therefore, probably, look upon it as an effect of vainglory. He contented himself accordingly with stating his name, and those of all the regiments in which he had served, together with his actual employment in the town of Bordeaux.

“It is most fortunate!” exclaimed his companion, “that I should have trespassed on the goodness of one, who will be more easily inclined to pardon me, when he hears the delinquent is William Clifford, the nephew of an old acquaintance. My uncle, who resides permanently in Italy, has often mentioned M. de Brissac to me with sincere regard, and my valise contains at this moment a letter, in which I am recommended to his especial notice during the short time I tarry at Bordeaux.”

“It is, indeed, most fortunate,” echoed the general, “and I cannot sufficiently rejoice in an opportunity of showing the slightest attention, to a relative of my good lord, your uncle, whose kindness to me, during our short acquaintance, will not easily be forgotten.”

The young man looked surprised. “My uncle,” said he, “is known by the name of the Chevalier Clifford, and I thought there

were few people who were acquainted with his former position in society."

The general smiled. "You need not fear my indiscretion," he said; "for believe me, you are now conversing with one who is well informed of your uncle's previous history. At the time I knew him, indeed, he was always addressed by his hereditary title, and was a great favourite at the court of St. Germain, having left England with the determination never to return to a country whose government he could not acknowledge, and where his adherence to the Stuart party was sufficiently well known, to prevent its being any longer either a safe or a desirable residence. He attached himself, therefore, to the service of the exiled family; but in consequence of some transaction in which the English king showed but little gratitude for the sacrifices your uncle had made, he changed his plan, and travelled farther south in search of a resting-place. If these particulars, which I gained from his own lips, appear to authorize further confidence, I can only say with truth, that every thing relating to my noble friend will be most interesting to me."

"Pardon my reserve," replied William,

“ which I exercise merely from consideration for the chevalier’s peculiar notions ; but you have convinced me, that with you it is useless. My uncle’s estates were sequestered on his departure, and it must be now about eleven years ago that my father, on his deathbed, enjoined me to leave England, and commit myself to the guardianship and protection of my uncle. The brothers had never disagreed on any subject but politics ; and, after the disgrace of the elder, many people urged my father to apply for a transfer of the property to himself, in which undertaking, his well-proved loyalty held out every prospect of success. But he was not one to build up his own fortune on the ruin of a brother he loved most tenderly, and though with his dying breath he charged me never to entertain a thought prejudicial to the interests of the reigning family, the terms in which he spoke of his brother brought the tears to my eyes. I was then about thirteen years of age, and no sooner were the last sad duties paid to my respected parent, than I set forth alone, to join my uncle on the continent. He received me most kindly, and we have since shared the remnant of our united fortunes. His taste for politics has long been extinguished, and his

present ambition is to recover the title and estates for me. He has long since drawn up a memorial, which is to be presented on his death; for nothing, he declares, shall ever induce him, while alive, to ask or receive a favour from the house of Hanover; but he feels no repugnance in thinking that their generosity may be exercised on me. You may believe, M. de Brissac, I do not place too much reliance on the success of such a strangely-conceived scheme, but as my uncle's mind is bent upon it, I would not appear ungrateful by speaking lightly on the matter, nor displease him by talking openly of his former title, as he assures me it is absolutely necessary to the furtherance of his plan, that he should remain incognito."

"All this will be sacred with me," replied the general; "but if it be not too presumptuous, may I inquire what leads you into this part of the world?"

"A restless, roving disposition," replied William, laughing, "which has led me for the last four years over almost every part of Europe, and which never allows me to remain, for any length of time in one place."

The conversation now changed to more general subjects, and William inquired if the



reports of the regent's intention to arrest the Duke of Maine, were well founded. But on these points he found his host uncommunicative, for De Brissac never forgot the public officer in the politician, and was too conscientious either to extol with servility, or to censure with virulence, the proceedings of that government in whose service he had enlisted, but whose actions he could not always approve. Whatever direction their discourse took, however, the old man observed the facility with which it was supported by his companion, and though he was perfectly sensible that the young Englishman had the advantage in every argument, envy formed no part of De Brissac's character, and this conviction only increased his growing predilection for William. They laughed together heartily over the spell that bound the governor to his unfrequented chateau; but it was with sincere gratitude that the latter listened to Clifford's proposal of sharing the remaining portion of his exile. Indeed, the second week passed almost too quickly for the old man, so perfectly happy was he in the society of William. He had never before found so patient a listener to his series of campaigns, and he was fully rewarded for his

former forbearance, by the success of his anecdote respecting the battle of ——. He related in glowing colours having ridden up just at the moment that a bullet, whizzing between the ears of his own charger, entered the right shoulder of the noble beast that bore his majesty. How that he, Louis de Brissac instantly dismounted, and kneeling on the prostrate corpse of an enemy, with some apt allusion to the same, entreated his most gracious majesty to preserve his precious existence by mounting the horse of his devoted soldier and subject; which the king, with his usual condescension, unhesitatingly accepted, graciously bestowing the dying animal on De Brissac, as “a slight acknowledgment of his esteem.” On his return to Bordeaux, he would show Clifford the skin of the horse, he said, which he had carefully preserved, together with the saddle, bridle, and housings, on which, though dreadfully discoloured by blood, the crown and initials were still visible. He had also in his possession a few words, written hastily in the king’s handwriting, in which he alluded to the circumstance (thanks to the memory of his aide-de-camp), and which had been sent him by an old comrade, who had turned courtier. William frequently found his

patience put to a severe test, by similar details, but he appreciated to the utmost the sterling worth of De Brissac's character, and judged an occasional sacrifice of time and attention, only due to the kindness of his host.

There was one subject, however, on which the general touched, and on it William became deeply interested. It was his mother: and although her early death had prevented the young Englishman from retaining a clear recollection, either of her person or her demeanour, that love which would have been hers if alive, now prompted him to listen with anxiety to the slightest mention of her name. De Brissac, in the course of conversation, observed, laughingly, that he might almost consider William as a compatriot, seeing that his mother was a Frenchwoman.

"Were you acquainted with her?" asked William, in a tone of anxious inquiry.

"No," replied his friend, "I never saw her but once on my return to Paris after a long absence. It was at the palace of the Tuileries, on the eve of her marriage; she was hanging on your father's arm, and conversing with his gracious majesty, (may his soul rest in peace!) and well do I recollect the laugh that my anxiety

to ascertain her name, raised against me. Her reign of beauty had then lasted two years ; every courtier in succession had paid his devoirs at her shrine ; and I have every reason to believe, that she was one of the first whose charms made an impression upon the too susceptible heart of the Regent. Nay, I was positively assured that this Prince, then a very young man, would willingly have sacrificed all the prejudices of his station to have obtained her. Be this as it may, after report had bestowed her hand upon one half of the French nation, she bestowed it herself upon the handsome young Englishman, whom she had known but a few weeks. I wished him safe out of our good city of Paris, Mr. Clifford ; for the dark looks and the suppressed rage that lurked in many countenances, were but slight demonstrations of the ill will which that marriage excited. Our proud Frenchmen could not brook the idea of a stranger carrying off the prize, and yet he did so in triumph.”

“ And was she as beautiful as report bids us believe, general ? ” asked William.

“ I have never seen her equalled,” replied De Brissac ; “ she was tall and dignified, with something commanding in her manner, as if aware

of the influence which she exercised over so many. I only saw her once, but I have never forgotten her, and, indeed, had we met again, I would not have answered for this tough heart of mine, though she was my junior by many years." The governor would often conclude a similar speech, by complimenting his guest on the striking resemblance which he bore to his mother, both in feature and manner; and, indeed, on that score, he seemed to think that he could hardly say too much.

Accomplished, gay, and eminently handsome, William shone in society; but was to be known and to be loved in domestic life. The necessity of acting and judging early for himself, had produced a degree of decision and firmness which, combined with an uncompromising candour, gained him the respect of all ages and conditions. But it was left to few to sound the depths of his mind, to discover the hidden treasures of a devoted and affectionate heart. By the time the two companions left the chateau for Bordeaux, De Brissac was so deeply impressed with the soundness of William's judgment, and the excellence of his heart, that there were but few thoughts the old man considered it necessary to withhold from his newly-gained friend. On

their arrival at Bordeaux he felt a pride in presenting the young stranger to the principal inhabitants of the town and province; and as the season of festivity was approaching, Clifford yielded to the governor's persuasions, and announced his determination of remaining six weeks or two months at Bordeaux. The beauty of his person, and the refinement of his manners, qualities that strike the eye while deeper ones are hid, were alone sufficient to make him a general favourite. The old ladies flattered, and the young ladies smiled on him; the old men admired, and the young men envied him: but he had no sincerer friend than De Brissac; none who loved or esteemed him more. It might seem that a provincial town and a limited society would have few charms, when compared with the brilliant cities in which Clifford had lately resided. Yet six months passed away at Bordeaux, and he never spoke of the probability of departure. The general's affection was increased by such an undoubted proof of friendship, but others who listened to William's numerous reasons and unasked apologies, judged more from things that they saw, than causes which he assigned, and put their own construction on the matter.



## CHAPTER II.

ALTHOUGH the minority of Louis XV. presented on the whole a peaceable aspect, yet the grasping ambition, and the inordinate expenditure of his predecessor, had entailed more difficulties on the government than were at first expected. Louis XIV. had, on his deathbed, nominated his nephew, the Duke of Orleans, as head of the Council of Regency; less, it is supposed, from individual partiality, than from the knowledge that his election was expected by the nation. The king's presentiment was shortly after more than verified, upon Philip's being invested with absolute and undivided power. During the first years of his short but popular government, although freed from the harassing responsibility of foreign warfare, the regent found ample occupation either in con-

ciliating the court of England, which regarded with a jealous eye, the asylum afforded to the exiled family of the Stuarts, or in frustrating the constant conspiracies which placed both his authority and his person in imminent danger.

The Cardinal Alberoni, who directed the public affairs in Spain, and who pursued with ardour, every chimera that his own ambition could raise, kept up a constant correspondence with the disaffected portion of the French aristocracy. Nor did the Quadruple Alliance, which in August, 1718, menaced Spain with the united force of England, Austria, France, and Holland, deter him from following up his complicated system of intrigue. We shall not often be tempted to interrupt the course of a narrative chiefly devoted to the hopes and fears, the joys and sorrows of private life, for the purpose of relating any of the great events of contemporary history, which are ordinarily less interesting than instructive to the general reader; but we must dwell for a moment on the particulars of a conspiracy which came to light during the year in which this tale commences, and in which conspiracy the ambassador of his most Catholic Majesty bore a prominent part.

The legitimated children of the late king, instigated not less by the persuasions of their partisans, than by the whispers of ambition, and supported by the secret influence of Spain, formed a plan for transferring the viceregal authority to the Duke of Maine. As a statesman and a politician, as a ruler and as an administrator, the Duke of Orleans had shown talents which no one had expected from him. Yet, however high the regent might stand as a public character, his private life was a tissue of dissipation and profligacy, which awakened the voice of censure, even at a moment when licentiousness seemed to have reached its meridian. The conspirators had thus actually gained over several members of the parliament to their cause, when their intentions were defeated by the vigilance of Philip, whose vigorous measures gradually subdued the spirit of rebellion. The Prince de Cellemare, the Spanish envoy, was arrested, together with the refractory members of the parliament and many of the nobility: while the Duke of Maine and his brothers, were degraded from the rank of princes of the blood. In the month of December, the duke and his wife, a princess of Bourbon, were thrown into

separate prisons, and the following year it was found necessary to continue the arrests, although the general aspect of affairs was one of increasing tranquillity.

Nevertheless the encouragement that the regent's example afforded swept down every barrier of decorum in the court of France, and even extended its pernicious influence to adjoining nations. The dominion of the fair sex was, of course, most arbitrary, at a moment when gallantry and ambition went hand in hand, when individual infidelity was not unfrequently construed into treason, and a *lettre de cachet* but too often completed a series of billets-doux. Even the remote provincial cities were not without their share of the agitation that prevailed in the capital, and Bordeaux participated as much as any in the rumours (at least) which disturbed the metropolis. At the time of Clifford's arrival in that city, messengers were coming and going daily. Troops occasionally halted there on their way to Bayonne; and the Fort du Ha. then the state prison of the province, not unfrequently opened its gates to receive some fresh inmate. The slightest incident which broke in upon the monotony of a country town,

excited a disproportionate degree of interest, but it was the arrival of one particular prisoner that stirred up the spirit of curiosity among the Bordellois.

The variety and contradictory nature of the reports which were in circulation respecting him, proved how little any one knew of the truth. While one affirmed that he had secret intimation of the identity of the prisoner with the Duke of Maine; another had every possible reason to believe that it was the duchess herself, who having escaped from her former prison in male attire, had been overtaken and conducted secretly to Bordeaux. A third confuted both opinions, by asserting that the stranger, who was known by the name of Dumont, was tall and well made, and could not, in consequence, bear the slightest resemblance, either to the "cripple" or the "dwarf," by which distinguishing appellations the duke and his consort were then known. Some ventured to assert, without hesitation, that the stranger's offence was neither political nor connected in any way with the cabals of the late king's children.

Gascony in general, and Bordeaux in par-

ticular, is not famous for a population wanting in the virtue of curiosity. But prying, questioning, and insinuating, all of which laudable and dignified measures were employed by the inhabitants of that city, for the purpose of discovering who and what the prisoner was, had no effect on the stony-hearted walls of the Fort du Ha. Never was Clifford more sincerely envied by the inhabitants of Bordeaux for his favour with De Brissac, than a few days after the arrival of the mysterious offender, when the young Englishman paid his accustomed visit to the fortress. But William, it appeared, was not sensible of the peculiar advantage of his situation, for he entered the general's apartment with a determination rather to avoid than to court a subject, which he had heard exhausted in surmise, in every saloon he had entered during the last week.

He found the general pacing up and down the room, with one hand thrust far into the breast of his military frock, and he continued his walk, even after the entrance of William, who threw himself upon a chair and limited his inquiries to the health of De Brissac. With that inconsistency which will occasionally break

in upon the steady line of such a character as the governor, his first impression was disappointment at Clifford's lack of curiosity, although, for several days past, he had cautiously evaded every question that had been put respecting Dumont.

Clifford observed that his friend's mind was absorbed by something uncommon, and he read, without much difficulty, the direction of his thoughts. Accordingly, to gratify De Brissac rather than himself, he inquired, in a casual manner, if either the prisoner, or the cause for which he suffered, warranted the excitement that had prevailed throughout the town. The general halted before the chair on which Clifford sat, and replied, with an air of unusual importance,

“ It would be needless to deny, that in the office I hold under government, secrets of importance must necessarily be intrusted to me, but on this occasion I am as ignorant as yourself of the causes which brought M. Dumont, as he is called, to Bordeaux ; I have my own ideas on the subject, which may as well remain within my breast ; but one thing I must observe : that in all my long and varied experience, in no



country, in no station, did I ever meet with so extraordinary a person as the one in question."

"In what respect is he so extraordinary?" demanded William, without any very great eagerness. "Is he gloomy or furious under his confinement, rude or courteous to those who guard him?"

"Most courteous," replied the governor, "both in language and manner; but there is a natural superiority, an unquestionable dignity, that gives him an air of condescension, even towards myself, when receiving my orders, that, *parbleu!* I could not tolerate in any one else. I visit him often, but he does not either seek or shun my society, and I am totally at a loss to account for the interest with which he inspires me. But in this respect I am not singular: it was but this morning that I remarked the tone of deference with which the porteclefs addressed him, while sometimes all my authority is required to make those fellows treat their charges with common civility. But you shall judge for yourself, William, if you will relinquish other attractions for one evening, and sup with your old friend, and his new one. I wish you to see this Dumont. I am anxious to know whether

he will appear to you in the same uncommon light."

"I will come, willingly," replied William, as he rose to take his departure; "you have awakened more curiosity than I thought myself capable of on this subject. Farewell, then. I will be with you at the usual hour."

With all his good resolutions to be punctual, William was some twenty minutes later than he intended.

The governor was alone, and he held a silent reproof in his hand under the form of an infallible watch; but they had to wait some time longer before the sound of footsteps in the corridor announced the prisoner. The door opened, and the general advanced towards it, while Clifford rose with some feeling of curiosity, as Dumont made his appearance. His entry indeed corroborated De Brissac's statement; for it was that of a man accustomed to be treated with deference. His salutation was rather distant than cold, as, scarcely observing William, he remained near the window conversing with the general in a low tone. His back was almost turned to Clifford, who could therefore only remark his unusual height,

and the width of his shoulders, which bespoke a Herculean strength; but every limb was moulded in the same form, and it was by comparison alone that the eye estimated their uncommon proportions. His attitudes had something military in their character, yet he seldom moved much out of the position into which he had thrown himself on first entering into conversation.

William could observe by the manner of the two speakers that their discourse was upon no subject of great interest; and the general soon led the way into an adjoining room, where a substantial though simple repast had been prepared. It was here that William had the means of scrutinizing Dumont's appearance more closely; and the prisoner's continual fits of abstraction gave him frequent opportunities of doing so unremarked. Yet the young Englishman was at a loss to define the peculiarity of that countenance, whose features were neither remarkable for great beauty nor originality. The seat of expression, of indefinable expression, was in the eyes and mouth. When silent and unexcited the countenance was perfectly calm; yet there was a look,

even in the moment of repose, intimating that energy lay dormant merely because there were few interests sufficiently powerful to call it into action. His hair and beard were strongly tinged with gray, which seemed at variance with his youthful air and vigorous movements : but there was something in his whole appearance that defied scrutiny, even as regarded his age.

The general treated him with marked respect ; but William, who knew the old man well, could easily perceive a degree of vexation at the failure of many a blameless art to draw M. Dumont into a prolonged conversation. He accordingly exerted himself to supply the deficiency, but was surprised to find that the stranger's presence acted as a restraint even upon him ; and he often detected himself weighing his words, lest they should appear trivial or unprofitable to his new acquaintance. After some little time had passed, however, William's natural vein of eloquence carried him on ; and although the general's replies were not strikingly brilliant, nor those of Dumont frequent, yet he contrived to banish the silence which he knew was irksome to De Brissac. An observation

from the latter led to a military discussion, and the general, at least, appeared astonished at the knowledge which the young Englishman displayed on a subject where he could have had little or no experience. But it was at the mention of the name of the Czar Peter, whose late visit to France had called forth all the wild vivacity of the French nation, that William's enthusiasm burst forth. Nor could the character of that great man have a warmer, and at the same time a more judicious advocate than Clifford, who extolled in the highest terms the man who had risen superior not only to his nation, but to the century in which he lived; who united in his person the statesman, the warrior, the sovereign, and the patriot; who was not insensible to the charms of private life, while he exercised all the paramount and extensive duties of a high and responsible station.

On this point William found the prisoner somewhat more communicative, and he listened with eagerness to the few but emphatic words in which Dumont described the emperor, whom he had seen during his residence at Paris. They both agreed in their approval of the motives

which induced the czar to study the manners and customs of more enlightened countries, in order to bring the stream of knowledge to enrich and fertilize his own. These observations led again to a discussion on travelling in general, and William eagerly advocated a cause in which he felt much interested. Every opinion he supported was couched in language at once pure and original, which bespoke a mind whose freshness had not suffered by contact with a calculating world ; and Dumont seeming gradually to find an interest in what was passing, yielded his undivided attention, and although he himself spoke but little, yet what he did say contributed to prolong conversation by encouraging William to proceed. Clifford dwelt at some length upon the pleasures and the advantages which might be derived from travelling, and without wearying his hearers with the details of scenes which they had never beheld, or persons whom they had never known, he gave his observations such a tone of individuality, as to be interesting to all.

“The only disadvantage,” he said, “that I have hitherto found is the necessity of constantly shifting the social scene; for the eye can be more easily accustomed to change than the

heart. Yet even this may have its good effect by counteracting an excessive taste for roaming, and inducing the traveller sooner or later to take up his abode in some particular spot, and exchange a rambling life for one of domestic calm. We must all confess the pleasure of having resided sufficiently long at any place to be aware that there are some few to whom our society is genial, and above all, to reflect that our solitude must be that of choice, and not of necessity."

William had addressed himself chiefly to the general, who heard him with complacency; but on concluding, he turned involuntarily, and found the eye of Dumont bent on him with an earnestness of scrutiny that appeared to search the spring of every word he uttered. Clifford had mixed much in society, and with the manners of the world he had acquired a certain degree of confidence that, without bordering on presumption, preserved him from awkwardness or restraint; yet his eyes now fell before the stranger's glance. At first he feared that he might have been betrayed into a remark applicable to the individual situation of the prisoner, but the next moment the conscious-



ness of having been tempted into a little declamation brought the blood to his cheek, and finding the searching eye still fixed upon him, he said, with his colour still heightened,

“You perhaps think, M. Dumont, that an unanswerable argument might be adduced against travelling in general, by the unbecoming confidence which it gives to the conversation and opinions of a young man, in the presence of those whose riper judgment and better experience should teach him silence.”

“You do not interpret the thoughts of others as well as you describe your own, Monsieur,” replied Dumont; “most men have a proficiency in some particular point, and constant experience has proved to me that I am seldom mistaken in my first estimate of the character of any person in whose society I have passed a few hours. I trust, therefore, you will not consider it a delusion of self-love when I say that there are few points in which we should disagree.”

He smiled as he spoke, and William bowed silently but gratefully; for both the smile and the voice had no slight effect on his mind. That voice, indeed, was low and emphatic, with

every possible variety of intonation exacting attention, with extraordinary power, and lending depth and value to the commonest sentiments he uttered. The three companions pledged each other in the general's wine, but it was to William that Dumont addressed himself, when he drank to the improvement of their acquaintance.

The governor, on his part, exulted in the fulfilment of the reciprocal impression which he had foreseen, while rising from the table he proposed adjourning to the ramparts to breathe the fresh air of the evening. Here Dumont threw off the reserve which had characterized his demeanour during the early part of the evening. It appeared as if in the open air he felt the prison weigh less heavily on his mind, his words and thoughts were released from their hidden fetters, and his spirit breathed more freely when removed from the atmosphere of those heavy walls. He conversed with, and listened to William, until they engaged in an animated discussion ; but suddenly the clock of the large tower tolled the hour, and a sentinel appeared at the end of the ramparts.

Dumont paused abruptly, to the surprise of Clifford, who had not observed the sudden apparition. "Monsieur le General," said the prisoner, turning to De Brissac, "it is seldom that I make a request, but feeling sensible that you will refuse me nothing consistent with your duty, I could wish to solicit the favour of occasional visits from M. Clifford."

The veteran's countenance brightened, and placing his hand on William's shoulder, he replied, "I have the more pleasure in complying with your request, as it will be a means of affording mutual enjoyment to two persons I most sincerely esteem."

Dumont expressed his thanks, and extending his hand to William, who pressed it warmly, he bowed to De Brissac and withdrew.

And now that they were alone, the old man turned to Clifford in the expectation of his expatiating largely on the impression which the prisoner had left on his mind; but he was not a little surprised at finding him unusually taciturn and reserved; although he owned that De Brissac's description was perfectly correct, and that the picture his own fancy had drawn was far outdone by the original. William said no more, however; for he felt as if a sudden and

secret bond of union connected him with the stranger—the bond of sympathizing minds and thoughts in unison—which the governor could not perceive, and in which he had no part. But as he bade his old friend good night, he thanked him in all sincerity, for this new proof of friendship ; and strange to say, he left the fortress with a sensation of unmingled pride, at having attracted the notice of *an unknown prisoner* ! William had visited foreign courts, and had already stood high in royal favour, yet he had never experienced a similar feeling ; and as he wrapped himself in his cloak, and walked leisurely through the streets of Bordeaux, he vainly attempted to ascertain the cause of his mental exaltation.

Perhaps a sort of partial revelation may occasionally be granted, on first beholding a person whose fate is ordained to be connected with our own, in some strange and complicated manner. Perhaps the heart may be quicker than the reason in forming its estimate, and that sometimes we blame ourselves for indulging a sudden predilection for those who are destined to sway the thoughts or actions of our after life, when that predilection has proceeded from the same instinct which guides inferior animals with

unerring wisdom. Be this as it may, William did not regret the evening which had detained him from other society, and if a gentle spirit presided over his dreams, her potency was, at least, shared by Dumont. His first impulse, on rising the next morning, was to repair to the fortress, with the chance of an interview; but his better judgment forbade a precipitancy which might appear indelicate in the eyes both of the general and his prisoner. He was soon after rewarded for his forbearance, by the entrance of one of the garrison soldiers, the bearer of a billet from his commanding officer, informing William that M. Dumont would be at liberty to see and converse with him during the stated hours of promenade, and that he expressed a wish to do so.

“I have obtained his word,” the governor’s note concluded, “that you will never make political affairs the subject of your discourse.”

William received the communication with sincere pleasure; and yet, as he walked towards the fortress, he experienced no slight degree of apprehension, lest, on a prosecution of their acquaintance, he should not justify M. Dumont’s opinion; and impressed as he was with the stranger’s universal superiority, he under-

rated his own powers of pleasing, and questioned his capacity of fixing the friendship of such a man.

Nevertheless he hastened to the interview with almost childish impatience, and following the soldier, was conducted according to the general's commands into the garden, which occupied the whole of the principal court. He there beheld Dumont, with his arms folded, in an attitude of deep reflection; but the prisoner, on perceiving William, advanced and greeted him kindly.

The cordiality of his manner banished in an instant every shadow of doubt and restraint from William's mind, and he abandoned himself, without hesitation, to the charms of a conversation in which all the varied powers of a great and extraordinary mind, and all the extensive knowledge which can only be gained by long and busy acquaintance with the world, were brought into play by his companion, as if for the purpose of exciting all the strong enthusiasms and brilliant fancies of the young Englishman's fresh and energetic nature.

From that day William's visits to the Fort du Ha were frequent.

### CHAPTER III.

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AT the period of which we are speaking, the city of Bordeaux laid claim to pre-eminence, in more ways than one, over its neighbours. The commerce of the town was great, and its traders a body of importance. The noblesse boasted a decent antiquity, the rest of the inhabitants were for the most part opulent, and their hospitality proverbial; but amongst those who presided chiefly over “the world” of the Gascon capital, was a Madame D’Aubry. The sister of an English baronet, she had offended his pride by marrying (late in life) a French merchant, who died shortly after their union, leaving his widow in possession of a considerable jointure, and the largest hotel in Bordeaux, where she resided with her niece at the time of the commencement of our tale. A more perfect contrast could scarcely be conceived than that presented by these two relatives, as they sat together one spring morning, in

a spacious and well-furnished apartment of the Hotel D'Aubry. The elder lady was bending anxiously over some apparatus cleverly constructed, for the furtherance of that style of female handiwork which rescues its performer from the imputation of idleness, while it leaves the thoughts and the tongue in a state of undoubted freedom. In figure she was tall and spare, and her face (for it would be flattery to say countenance) was one of those which it is most difficult to impress upon the memory. It had no beauty to attract, no ugliness to arrest the eye ; yet there was an air of goodhumour that helped to redeem the negative style of her appearance, and her eyes actually acquired an approach to expression, when they were directed towards that side of the room where sat her niece, the gentle Blanch Courtenay ; for sincere affection bound her to her young relation, who had now passed many years under her care.

Blanch was seated near an open window, the Venetian blinds of which were not sufficiently closed to prevent a slanting sunbeam from entering the room, and gilding a profusion of fair hair that adorned her exquisitely-shaped head, and was arranged in a manner entirely at variance with the stiff and towering head-dresses of the



day. She was rather tall than otherwise, and the eye of the most fastidious sculptor could hardly have detected a fault in the rounded outline of her form, and the beautifully feminine proportion of every limb. Before her stood a table, with several books, writing-utensils, and ornaments of much taste, which showed it to be her property, while some drooping flowers alone seemed unworthy of their situation.

Blanch was reading, and she bent her head so intently over the volume, that it was difficult to observe her face, but in her complexion were beautifully blended the tints of delicacy and health, and the atmosphere of brightness which she had chosen seemed in perfect keeping with the character both of her mind and person. From a child she had been distinguished for the "swete cheerfulness" (as the poet hath it) of her disposition. It was almost impossible to pass any time in her society without acknowledging the influence of a vivacity at once brilliant and refined. She had none of that capricious and exaggerated display of mirth, which is too often coupled with an answering degree of melancholy, breaking forth like the fitful gleams of a stormy sun; her cheerfulness was a steady

emanation of radiance from the fountain of a young and inexperienced breast, across which misfortune had as yet cast no shadow.

Madame D'Aubry loved her niece sincerely and disinterestedly, and seemed never happy but in her society. She had been calculating for some time past on the possibility of their separation, and it was this reflection, no doubt, that gave rise to the following conversation :

“ Did I tell you, dear Blanch,” she began, “ that I heard yesterday of the arrival of an old acquaintance of mine, Mr. Roland Stanley? We have not met, it is true, since we were children, but a messenger from England must always be welcome, and I have no doubt he will bring some news of your parents ; I am afraid, my dear child, they will not leave me in quiet possession of you much longer.”

Blanch looked up from her book lest she should appear inattentive, but made no remark.

“ How surprised and delighted they would be to see you ! My sister, in particular, who, as I always told her, set her mind too much upon beauty, and thought so little of you, because your sister was, at that time, the fairest of the two. I shall always think their resolution

to part with you for so long was no great proof of feeling; though, as far as I am concerned, the day of your arrival was a blessed one."

"Do not speak severely of them, my dear aunt," replied Blanch; "you know the physicians recommended change of climate, as the only hope of saving my life, and you yourself proposed to receive me."

"True, dear child; but I repeat once more, their minds were set upon your sister, and you were scarcely considered, and yet she had an untractable disposition, and a most ungovernable temper."

"Poor Lucy!" said Blanch, seriously, "she is dead, do not let us recapitulate her faults."

"Well, well, they will find the difference when you go home; for you were always good, but now you are beautiful, Blanch, and your mother will say so when she sees you."

The girl smiled. "Why I never heard you speak so imprudently before, my dear aunt," she said; "are you not afraid of the effect your words may have on my vanity?"

"No, child; if the sweet speeches of all the young gallants who crowd round you, have failed in instilling one jot of conceit into your

disposition, I do not think the discourse of your old aunt will have any such evil consequence. To be sure, as I have often thought and regretted, this is not a society in which you ought to move, and though it may satisfy me from necessity, I frequently wonder that you should derive any pleasure from mixing with such a set of unpolished boors."

"Nay, nay, my dear aunt," replied the other with a smile; "I am sure there are many people in Bordeaux who do not deserve such severity of criticism, and who, according to my poor judgment, are sufficiently agreeable and refined for any society."

But before her aunt could reply, they were interrupted by the entrance of the servant, who announced Mr. Clifford. Blanch half rose, and then resumed her seat, and Madame D'Aubry paused in the middle of a stitch, and transferring the needle to the left hand, stretched forth the right hand to her visiter, begging him at the same time to sit beside her.

William was at a loss how to combine civility to both ladies, by accepting Madame D'Aubry's invitation, without turning his back to her fair niece. He, however, seated himself, and then

wheeled his chair round, so as to be midway between the two.

“It is a long time since you have done us this honour,” the aunt began.

“A long time, indeed,” echoed Blanch.

“I scarcely deserve that you should have remarked it,” replied William, “but lately my time has been much taken up.”

“Oh, yes,” interrupted Madame D’Aubry, “we heard of your having formed an acquaintance with the state prisoner, and we are most anxious to know who and what he is; pray do tell us all about him.”

But it so happened that this was a subject on which William was predetermined not to enlarge, for he disliked the idea of Dumont’s becoming a common topic of discourse among those who did not know him, and were incapable of understanding the peculiarities of his character.

In William’s estimation Dumont stood too far above the common level of mankind, for the superficial though busy eye of curiosity to distinguish his real attributes. Clifford therefore contented himself with assuring Madame D’Aubry that the person in question was neither the Duke or the Duchess of Maine, and that all the

certain information he could give was, that M. Dumont was a most agreeable companion. He thus effected his end with skilful policy, and by the calm and every-day tone of his voice, succeeded in stifling the rising spark of curiosity in the breast of the elder lady at least, even though he somewhat suddenly changed the conversation. Blanch had often in her own mind commented on and admired William's conversational powers, but at this moment she listened to him with comparatively little pleasure, though she knew not why. Perhaps the influence of the baneful number Three, which, though it claimed its graces, owned also its fates and furies, was shed over the discourse, and prevented it from flowing smoothly on. She wished, it must be confessed, that William's remarks should be addressed to, and answered by herself, without the restraint of a solitary listener, although she was perfectly aware that their conference would only treat of such subjects as might in fact be heard by the whole world. Clifford seemed to partake of the feeling, and Blanch well knew that the conversation which he adapted to Madame D'Aubry's taste was not such as gave him any satisfaction.

The arrival of Mr. Roland Stanley, which took place almost immediately after that of Clifford, was in consequence welcomed by all parties. This gentleman, although announced by Madame D'Aubry as her playmate, appeared her junior by at least twelve or fifteen years. His dress was in strict accordance with the reigning fashion, his manner consequential, and his compliments profuse, while he affirmed that he had seized the earliest opportunity of waiting on his countrywomen.

Clifford had, with his usual civility, risen on Stanley's entrance, and kindly yielding his seat near Madame D'Aubry to the new comer, took possession of one contiguous to the table before described beneath the window.

Madame D'Aubry had so many questions to ask, and Mr. Stanley had so much inclination to answer them, that they were soon engrossed in a sort of perpetual catechism, which enabled the two others to converse at their ease. This they did for some time, without touching on any thing particularly interesting, but both tacitly acknowledging the absence of that restraint, which a third person had before occasioned. Clifford indeed no longer avoided the subject of

Dumont, now that he found himself with a person he believed capable of viewing in its true light the friendship which subsisted between himself and the prisoner, and he insensibly brought the discourse into that channel. He described the particulars of their first meeting, and their subsequent interview, and his fair hearer listened with undisguised interest.

“His powers of mind must be very great,” she said, smiling at his enthusiasm, “to have interested you so deeply.”

“They are great, indeed,” said William, “and varied as well. He is evidently a man of profound erudition, and can talk on the most abstruse branches of science with unhesitating facility; then breaking off abruptly, he will indulge in a light strain of irony, or an occasional burst of satire, that would do well to lash the follies of the age. On subjects of literature, he displays the most astonishing range of information, and I verily believe his enthusiastic admiration of the glories of nature would rival your own.”

“It is almost cruel,” said Blanch, “to give me such a description of a person with whom I never can be acquainted; but tell me,” she added, more seriously, “is it true that he has involved himself in political intrigues? I



have heard that the regent is not given to clemency in those affairs, and it would be dreadful to think that such a man as you represent M. Dumont to be, might be sacrificed for, at worst, some mistaken notion of patriotism."

"I know not," replied William, "he never alludes, directly or indirectly, to the cause of his imprisonment; scarcely, indeed, does he ever speak of himself; though, on other subjects, he is far more communicative to me, than he appears to any body else. I am flattered by such confidence, I confess, though I am well aware that I in no way merit the distinction."

"We always argue in that way," said Blanch, "in regard to the persons whom we esteem the most; yet it is strange how self-contented and easy we feel with those who are indifferent to us. Does he feel his imprisonment? Do his misfortunes affect him greatly?"

"No words approaching to complaint, or even murmur, ever cross his lips;" replied William, "he talks of sorrow merely in its general sense, and of trials as impartially inflicted on mankind."

"I would give a great deal to see the person of whom you speak in such terms!" exclaimed

Blanch, smiling. "You are in general so difficult to please, and so saving of praise, that I do believe M. de Brissac is the only human being in Bordeaux on whom you occasionally lavish a few words of eulogium."

Clifford might, perhaps, have answered this accusation by saying, that his thoughts did more justice to one other person in the city, had he not observed that Madame D'Aubry's eyes were turned in his direction. She had an air of consequence, which appeared to William the forerunner of some extraordinary intelligence, and he soon found that he was not mistaken.

"Mr. Stanley, Blanch, has brought us great news," said her aunt with an air of reflected grandeur; "your parents have attracted the notice of his Majesty, who has appointed your father to an office in the royal household, and they now reside permanently at Hampton Court Palace, a few miles from London; by all accounts, a most delightful abode. I fear, my love, they will now send for you. Did they allude to the subject, Mr. Stanley?"

"No, Madam," he replied; "I knew your relatives but little, and it was by chance Lady

Courtenay mentioned you, as a constant resident at Bordeaux ; but I cannot believe," he added, turning towards Blanch, "that your parents would deprive England any longer of so bright an ornament, or prevent their beautiful daughter from enjoying the pleasures and advantages of the English court."

He looked as if he expected a smile, and an answer, but was disappointed of both, and Madame D'Aubry, perceiving that it was so, continued :

"My dear Blanch, you are not aware that Mr. Stanley is speaking to you. Does not the prospect of returning home under such circumstances rejoice you ? "

"No," she replied eagerly, "I have no wish to leave Bordeaux ; you have always been so kind to me, and,—" She paused, for it struck her that the prospect of separation from her aunt would not be her principal regret, and Blanch scorned the slightest disingenuousness ; she therefore added, "I have been very happy here."

"But must it not have been a negative kind of happiness?" inquired Mr. Stanley, puzzled at her total absence of ambition."

“I think not,” said Blanch, “at least I have been contented.”

She felt confused, however, at having spoken so earnestly; and, casting her eyes on the ground, vainly struggled with an uncalled for blush that spread itself over her cheek. The silence was painful; her eyes began gradually to fill, and with that mysterious sense which it is impossible to define, she *felt* that William’s eye was on her. She wondered he did not speak, and dreaded looking up, lest she should encounter his gaze, but an irresistible impulse compelled her to do so. It was but for an instant; but as she caught the expression a tremour pervaded her whole frame, and a thrill ran through every vein! She turned towards her aunt, who was now busily employed in the formation of a flower; but Roland Stanley’s observation had been keener, and Blanch’s confusion was not a little heightened by a certain look of intelligence which he thought proper to assume. Many a sensation had been busy in that little circle during the few moments’ pause which had taken place; William had experienced hope, and Blanch alarm; Stanley had read as deeply, perhaps

more deeply, into their feelings than either of them; while Madame D'Aubry had put the finishing shade to the last *pensée* of the Marquise de Beaulieu's Prie Dieu. Yet she herself was at last struck by the unusual silence, and hastened to supply the deficiency of loquacity on the part of her guests by some observation which would appear as uninteresting now to us, as it did then to her three companions. William Clifford rose soon after and took leave, while Stanley followed his example, as soon as Madame D'Aubry's thirst for English news was in some degree appeased.

When they were both gone, that lady found her niece suddenly and unusually silent, and was half angry at the pertinacity of her refusal to pass the evening in some favoured *coterie*. But Blanch preferred the solitude of her own apartment, to which she repaired after hearing the carriage drive from the door that conveyed Madame D'Aubry to the Marquise de Beaulieu's reception. In passing through the vestibule, however, she found a small but beautiful nosegay lying on the marble table.

Blanch made no inquiry, but carried it into her own room, where she spent the remainder

of the evening, and there sat and thought until long past the usual hour for retiring to rest.

The events of that day, although apparently of little consequence, formed a source of deep reflection to her. In the intelligence that Mr. Stanley had brought, she foresaw no distant prospect of a change, the bare idea of which was startling; for, cheerful as was her natural disposition, Blanch knew that her path could not always lie amid such even ground as hitherto, and she feared the consequences of external vicissitude on the contented state of her mind. She had arrived at the age of twenty, having passed eight years beneath her aunt's roof, the concentrated object of admiration at Bordeaux, without allowing her young heart to be touched even for a moment. Her indifference was put down as pride, and though she listened with complacency to Madame D'Aubry's arguments in favour of a future and suitable union in her native country, it would hardly have been compatible with her uncalculating nature to have done so, had not that indifference been real and unaffected.

The mind of Blanch was deeply imbued with that spirit of enthusiasm which leads to the admiration of all that is beautiful and

good, and endows the commonest occurrences of life with zest and interest. But a strong sense of duty, and a high regard for religion, conducted that enthusiasm into the right channel, and gave a just direction to all her feelings. The knowledge that she was the object of an affection she could not return, was always a source rather of regret than triumph to Blanch, from whose lips the ill-timed jest never wounded the ear on a subject that bears no merriment to him it so nearly concerns. With miserly care she had treasured up every sympathy of her heart to lavish on the single object who might one day claim her as his own ; for though gentle and feminine by nature, her determination was unalterably fixed to bestow her hand upon the first who should possess the undivided empire of her affections.

The neglect with which she had been treated by her parents, seemed in a great measure to exempt her from the necessity of consulting them on the subject. But when she calculated on the possibility of being recalled to England, her first impulse was to rejoice that no one had yet been inscribed in her heart's secret records. The next thought was, to question if a name could not

he found there, although the characters in which it was traced were dim and shadowy. The conversation of Mr. Stanley had occasioned this self-examination, but she was alarmed and perplexed on calling to mind the tremour that pervaded her whole frame, as her eyes met those of William. Her eyes had often encountered glances of admiration as ardent ; and she might have felt sorrow at exciting feelings which she could not return ; but never before had they produced the slightest approach to sympathy in her mind.

It was a fine night, a soft warm wind made its way through the open casement, and as Blanch sat near it, absorbed in thought, the flowers beside her seemed to take their part in the argument. For some time past, William Clifford had paid a silent and unostentatious tribute, by presenting her, as on the present occasion, with the rarest exotics that could be procured, and there was something pure and refined in the gift, that rendered it peculiarly adapted to Blanch's taste, while its intrinsic value did not call upon her to refuse the offering. As she endeavoured to persuade herself that the agitation of the morning was owing to some



casual excitement, the sweet breath of the flowers seemed to waft contradiction, and refute every argument she adduced. Their obtrusive fragrance indeed suggested many a question which she found it difficult to answer. They boasted the care which she had bestowed on them, they reminded her of the precautions she had used to prevent their predecessors from withering prematurely, and of the fact of some still retaining a place upon her table, even when both their beauty and their perfume had departed. Fatigued at length by a dispute, in which even inanimate objects had the advantage, Blanch closed the window, and betook herself to rest, though it was long before she could compose herself to sleep. Resolved to think no more on such subjects, she turned her thoughts towards England, and endeavoured to derive consolation from the hope that her parents would be too much engrossed by their new vocations to think of her. She strove, in the spirit of philosophy, to conjure up some beautiful conception of the court to which Mr. Stanley had alluded; but, alas! how quickly does the mind turn from the contemplation of those scenes, in which the heart has no share. Her thoughts would not bear dic-

tation, and they stole at length to the Fort du Ha, and dwelt long on the prisoner, while Blanch encouraged them to remain there, perhaps forgetting, that the thought of Dumont, must necessarily be bound up with that of the friend who had awakened her interest on the subject.

Her reverie was as usual interrupted by her aunt, who in all the pomp of powder and brocade, crept stealthily into the room, to regret her dear child had passed so dull an evening all alone, and to report the numerous inquiries resulting from her absence. Madame D'Aubry also informed her niece, that at the earnest solicitations of her numerous friends, she intended to celebrate her dear Blanch's *fête* by a splendid masquerade during the course of the ensuing month.

CHAPTER IV.

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It may not, perhaps, be quite superfluous to give a slight account of the Englishman, with whom we became acquainted in the last chapter, under the name of Mr. Roland Stanley, and with whom perhaps we shall have more to do hereafter. Though not without individual character, he was one of those persons who, both from principle and inclination, amalgamate with every society into which they are thrown. He considered himself fortunate, however, in discovering that his first acquaintance in Bordeaux, were of sufficient consideration to ensure some for himself, if frequently seen with them. He accordingly overwhelmed Madame D'Aubry with professions of esteem, and it was shortly whispered among the talkative portion of the inhabitants that the widow,

or her fortune, had made no slight impression on his heart. Be this as it may, for the report was spread the third time they were seen together, Stanley soon found his way into every *réunion*, and whilst he did not conceal his wish to extend the limits of his general acquaintance, he continued a constant visiter at the Hotel D'Aubry, while at the same time he sedulously cultivated the acquaintance of Clifford.

It was in conversation with Stanley, indeed, that William's mind reverted to politics, which, as a forbidden subject, between himself and Dumont, had lately been banished from his mind. He had never felt any ambition for the career of a statesman, nor did he derive much satisfaction from a fruitless inquiry into the hidden causes of the proceedings of any particular government; but a long absence from England had not extinguished an inherent love for his country, and he listened with eagerness to every certain information respecting it. There was something peculiarly cautious in the language and manners of Stanley, which put Clifford involuntarily on his guard. He observed that his countryman (at least on first acquaint-

ance), seldom started any topic of his own, but appeared to study the opinions, and echo the sentiments of his companions,—or to speak in the language of a gambler—he never led, but invariably followed suit in conversation, until by this means he had discovered the tastes and propensities of his associates.

He paid an assiduous court to William, by whose means he every day increased his connexions, while his eagerness to obtain popularity, with an occasional attempt at confidence, soon enlightened Clifford on the views of his compatriot. But the misfortunes which had clouded his early days, had implanted in William's breast a deeply-rooted aversion for the cabals of party, and whatever was his opinion of the Stuart claims, he could not but acknowledge that the country presented a more flourishing aspect beneath the sway of the triumphant house. Nor was the Chevalier de St. George — a man of feeble abilities and vacillating conduct—likely in any way to win over Clifford to a cause which had been condemned by his father's last words. But Roland Stanley, who possessed no insignificant share of penetration, in discovering his young com-

panion's view of the subject, derived consolation from another source. It was no difficult matter to perceive that William's hopes were centred in one day returning to England, his reasons for quitting which were better known to his countryman than he might perhaps have liked. To this point all his wishes were directed: England was to him the Land of Promise, the chosen theatre for all his speculative dreams, and the only pleasure which he found in Roland's conversation was in any details of manners or scenery peculiar to his loved, though scarcely remembered country.

Stanley, on his side, eager to benefit by such enthusiasm, occasionally defeated his own object, either by intruding himself, at an unwelcome moment, by incessantly haunting Clifford's path, or by not unfrequently waylaying him on his road to the fortress.

When Clifford was there, however, all external speculations were forgotten in the society of Dumont. This extraordinary man was in every way calculated to fix both the imagination and the friendship of the young and enthusiastic Englishman. His stately bearing, his lofty demeanour, the eloquence of his language,

the dignity of his silence, together with a stamp of conscious, though unassuming superiority, had made a deep impression upon Clifford (as we have before observed) at their first meeting. But in their frequent and (after a short period had elapsed) their daily interviews, it may easily be conceived, that this favourable impression ripened into a sincere friendship, when every day that passed gave William some fresh proof of the interest with which the prisoner regarded him. Yet, in the conversation he had held with Blanch, Clifford had not suffered himself to be led away by gratitude for the prisoner's partiality, nor by any other mistaken feeling, to exaggerate the character of Dumont. He had spoken with his usual unwavering veracity, and had not even told her all that he had admired, at least as far as regarded the prisoner's acquirements. During his travels, Clifford had himself acquired a knowledge of several languages, but Dumont's proficiency in all those he knew, and many more, and the native accent with which he spoke in each, was a source of real astonishment to Clifford. His acquaintance with foreign literature was even more surprising from its range, and William,

who loved the lore of his native land, was often put to silence by the questions or remarks made upon the subject by the prisoner. Indeed, he could discuss the merits of various authors, both foreign and native, as if every line of their works were familiar to him; and on the theme of poetry, his eloquence was unparalleled. But it was not always that he chose these subjects in his conversations with William, whom he would often question on his future prospects or immediate concerns, with an air of interest, and offer advice in any matter of difficulty in an unassuming, though judicious manner.

“You are later than usual,” he said one day, as the latter entered the garden; “the value of half an hour should be considered in our limited interviews.”

“Did you but know,” replied Clifford, “the ingenious arts I have practised to rid myself of one of my countrymen, whom I have often mentioned to you, and who detained me, in a most unwelcome manner with lengthy and tedious discussions, you would commend my diligence.”

“You appear little flattered,” observed Dumont, “by his obvious partiality, which is not



diminished by your indifference or reserve. But tell me, is there no single point of analogy in your opinions, no solitary instance in which you may derive either pleasure or profit from his discourse?"

"No, " replied William, "and yet I would not wrong Mr. Stanley by misrepresentation; he is better informed on many subjects than the men with whom we come in contact; and whatever may be our opinion of the cause he espouses, his firmness and devotion are in themselves worthy of admiration. But to say the truth, there are comparatively few to whom I look for interchange of ideas; and if I be no longer regarded as an agreeable member of society, it is you, Dumont, who are answerable for all the blame that is attached to my conduct."

The prisoner smiled. "Make your deposition," he said; "I am well accustomed to novel charges, but this last is totally incomprehensible."

"The reason is obvious; I leave your presence with every opinion and word you have uttered, fresh in my memory; I enter into the company of others, and find nothing but emptiness and frivolity, and my silent and involun-

tary comparisons call forth a smile upon my countenance which people look upon as scornful. Even if I listen to sentiments which have in them the spring of truth, the lack of eloquence usually robs the subject of half its charms, and fails in conveying a clear conception to the mind. But, perhaps," he added, laughing, "the greatest disadvantage I reap from your acquaintance, is an increase of self-love. A little while since, had any one spoken slightingly of me, or conducted themselves uncourteously towards me, I should have resented it according to the laws of custom alone; but now the remembrance of your friendship would raise me so far above those who dared to treat me with contumely, that I question if the silence of scorn would not be the most formidable weapon I could use."

"Add to this," replied Dumont, "that you have relieved the painful hours of a solitary man, that you have born his eccentricities with patience, cheered his gloomy moments, and above all, proved to him that there still exists one being in the world worthy of confidence and esteem. Perhaps, William, after what has passed between us to-day, I may appear want-

ing in delicacy when I request you to assist me;—but necessity is in some instances a tyrant that will listen to no scruples.”

“You have but to tell me what you desire,” exclaimed William, calmly, but earnestly; “I would little scruple risking my life to serve you.”

“Do you make no conditions,” inquired Dumont, “ere you enter blindly into an engagement?”

“No,” replied Clifford; “the man who would qualify an act of friendship has already destroyed the obligation!”

“You are wrong, William,” he said; “the motive may be a generous, but it is an imprudent one, and never suffer yourself to be misled by that sophistry, which would confound prudence with a calculation arising purely from self-interest. Prudence, when combined with generosity and candour, is a noble and useful quality, and one that preserves us from any temptation to make use of artifice and subterfuge, too often forced by circumstances on those whose natural disposition is frank and open. You will think me inconsistent,” he added, “for asking a favour, and then quarrelling with your readiness to grant it; but,

believe me, I am not insensible to your kindness. It is a matter of some importance to me, and cannot be attended with any evil consequences to yourself, although it is needless to observe that the strictest secrecy will be requisite."

"Hush!" exclaimed William, "I see the general approaching; something appears to have disturbed his usual tranquillity. God send he may not be the bearer of bad tidings!"

As De Brissac walked hurriedly up to the spot where they were standing, his manner was evidently constrained, and when he spoke it was in an abrupt tone, under which he endeavoured to conceal his reluctance.

"M. Dumont," he began, "it is my painful but imperative duty to inform you, that I have this morning received orders which, I regret to state, must be immediately enforced."

William's eye wandered alternately from the general's distressed countenance, to that of Dumont, which displayed the utmost unconcern, as he awaited in silence the conclusion of the intelligence.

"I must request you," continued De Brissac,

with some hesitation, "to follow me, in order that I may acquaint you with the changes that are appointed to be made. The privilege of walking in the open air is no longer to be extended to you, and I grieve to say that Mr. Clifford's visits must be discontinued for the present."

Dumont's lip curled with a bitter smile, as the general finished his speech; but when William broke forth into a passionate philippic on the caprices of the government, the prisoner pacified him with a word, and turning to the governor, whose brow began to cloud at these violent expressions, he excused the ardour of youth and affection. Then thanking the old man for the regret he testified in fulfilling an unpleasant duty, he followed him without delay, bidding William farewell, in a tone of encouragement which could not however dispel his sadness.

When they were gone, Clifford looked round, scarcely sensible of what had passed; so sudden, so unexpected was the separation, and then with a heavy heart he left the fortress to return home. His road lay through the Chapeau Rouge; and he hesitated whether or not he should pass Madame D'Aubry's house without going in.

Since the day that Blanch had evinced so much interest in the account of Dumont, the two had been invariably connected in his mind ; and yet he felt a degree of hesitation, with regard to entering, he had never before experienced. While in this state of uncertainty, he was attracted by the sight of Blanch on the balcony. She was tending the little bower of plants which distinguished their house from its neighbours, and appeared busily employed in cutting off the withered leaves and blighted flowers. As William approached, she perceived and saluted him gracefully : he already stood on the threshold, but various reflections urged him to refrain. At that moment a flower fell from above at his feet ; it was an *unfaded*, spotless Provins rose ! and Clifford stooping hastily, raised it from the pavement to his lips, and then placed it in his bosom. The act might have been an effect of simple gallantry ; but the earnestness he displayed was not lost upon Blanch, who in a few moments re-entered the window ; and he walked on towards his dwelling.

Another regret was now added to his store : that he loved Madame d'Aubry's niece with all the ardour and passion that were natural to

him, he had long been conscious; but the thought of gaining her affections, of inducing her to share the fate of an exile, whose only prospect was involved in uncertainty, was one he had frequently driven from his mind. Yet there was a magic in her presence, a spell in the very tone of her voice, that weakened the scruples of solitude, and wound itself round his heart, in spite of every contrary resolution. Perhaps the possibility of her departure had had a similar effect on both, and had caused as strict an investigation on his side as on hers. But there was more doubt, more difficulty, in the part which he had to enact, more uncertainty as to the path which he should pursue. In moments of despondency he would utterly relinquish every hope of deserving her love; but when his spirits rebounded with their natural buoyancy, William would feel that there was *that* within him which allied him too nearly to the noble nature of Blanch Courtenay, to doubt that there existed a hidden tie of sympathy between them.

The incident of the rose only entangled him in further perplexity, and, in spite of himself, he cherished the belief that Blanch had in-

tentionally sacrificed the pride of her little garden. On the other hand, he dwelt with deep sorrow on the danger that threatened Dumont, and on the possibility of never seeing him again, while he bitterly regretted the deprivation of that advice and sympathy, of which he now stood doubly in need. He also repented his reserve on the single subject of his attachment, for William was anxious to prove the extent of the confidence he placed in his friend, by making him acquainted with every particular of his short but not unchequered life.



CHAPTER V.

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A FORTNIGHT passed sadly and slowly for Clifford, during which time his constant entreaties to visit, or even temporarily share the captivity of Dumont, were firmly but not ungraciously refused by De Brissac, whose strict performance of his duty almost amounted to harshness in Clifford's somewhat prejudiced eyes. During this period he had rarely seen Blanch, and when they did meet it was only in a crowded room, under circumstances that precluded every opportunity of confidential conversation, and led him into no danger of betraying his feelings. Still he fancied that her manner was changed, there was an averted look, an assumed gaiety, and occasionally he perceived a slight tremour in the hand, though it was extended as usual. At the expiration of the fortnight, to his unspeakable satisfaction, William

received permission to visit Dumont in the cell to which he had that morning been removed, and after their first salutation, Clifford could not forbear remarking in no gentle terms on the small and confined size of the apartment.

Dumont smiled. "The daylight, and air of heaven are both allowed to enter here," he exclaimed, "and the atmosphere is neither so damp, nor so unwholesome as the one I have just quitted. So you see, William, to me this room is desirable."

Clifford looked at the speaker for some time earnestly. "Good heavens!" he cried, "how changed you are; your cheeks are wan, and your eye has lost its fire—are you ill, Dumont?"

"No," replied the other, calmly; "but it is always requisite for me to breathe the fresh air, and the necessity of total inaction, and of remaining in one position for any length of time together, generally causes extreme lassitude."

"Is it possible," cried William, indignantly, "that they have dared to treat you thus? Is it possible that the power which claims a divine origin can be thus perverted, and that tyranny and oppression have singled you out as their victim?"

“How can you constitute yourself as judge,” exclaimed Dumont, calmly, “when ignorant of every relative circumstance of the case? Or what grounds have you for supposing the treatment I receive, either unjust or unnecessary? You place me in an uncommon position, Clifford, by obliging me to stand on the defensive against my own cause, which you so warmly, though somewhat thoughtlessly advocate. But to change a subject on which we do not fully understand each other; have you forgotten the request I was about to make at our last meeting? I wish you to provide me with writing utensils, which you will of course carry away when you leave the Fort.”

William rose with his usual promptitude to seek what the prisoner desired, but Dumont stopped him by saying,

“You can bring them to-morrow, when we shall meet in our old rendezvous, the garden; the shortness of your visit, and swift return might create suspicion.” He paused for some moments, and then added, “You have remarked on my appearance, and I will do the same on yours, William; for though I cannot say your cheek is pale, or your eyes dull, there are certain

symptoms of moral suffering, which are very evident to me. What is it that preys upon your mind, or rather your heart, and who is it that usurps my place in both ? ”

Determined as William was to bestow his whole confidence on Dumont, and anxious as he felt to consult him on many points, it would naturally be supposed that he heard this question with pleasure. He found, however, that the task was more difficult than he imagined, and it was some time before he gained sufficient courage from the animating nature of the subject, to lay before his friend in unvarnished colours, the secret of his attachment for Blanch Courtenay. He then described exactly the situation in which he stood with regard to her, and the blame that he ascribed to himself, for having even by a look, betrayed the intensity of his feelings.

“The severity of your opinions on the sex, in general,” continued Clifford, “and the gathering frown on your brow, but too easily help me to your answer ; but she is so far removed both in bearing and disposition from the women of the day, and, pardon me, of this nation in particular, that a general argument will not

hold good with one who appears of a different century, nay, even of a different world."

Dumont did not answer him for several moments, and when he did so, the tone of his voice sounded harsh to his companion.

"I have long observed," he said, "that there was something on your mind, and partly guessed the truth, but not to this fearful extent; for I trusted to that discrimination which you have always evinced, as a safeguard from such blindness. That you might allow a comely face or a graceful form to haunt your fancy for a short period, that you might consider woman in her true light as the grace and ornament of society, I could easily conceive; but I hoped, nay, I believed, that your mind was too much set on high and lofty speculations to allow such a pitiable usurpation of the throne of reason as you now display. You boast of the superiority of your countrywoman, but from whom has she imbibed these rigid principles and refined ideas? Can it be from the general example of her own sex? from the admonitory speeches of her numerous suitors, or the judicious education of the wise relative whom you have mentioned?"

He turned towards Clifford, who, for the first time was deeply wounded by the prisoner's

language. "From none of these," he replied, his eye kindling as he spoke, "but from the sanctuary of her own spotless heart, from the innate purity, which no external contagion can destroy, from the noble rectitude, and the elevated understanding which are the gift of God himself, and which have secured to her the devoted and unchangeable love of a heart that never loved before."

Dumont shook his head with a melancholy smile. "It may be well to talk, perhaps even to think thus," he replied; "it is a sweet deception though an ephemeral one. But when the day of conviction comes, when the idol we have worshipped lies prostrate in the dust; or when the lip whose impassioned accents still vibrate in our ear, doles out its flimsy tale of falsehood or extenuation, or with shameless insolence exults in the success of the imposture and the credulity of its victim,—oh! that is anguish which rankles and festers in the inmost heart, and spreads its baneful influence over the whole soul."

"Dumont," said William, "I have unintentionally awakened some painful recollections which can alone account for your speaking in this manner.—But I forgive you; had you ever

been in the society of Blanch Courtenay, you would neither wrong her, nor wound me by such language."

"The language of experience is harsh and ungenial, William," continued the prisoner; "but from the lips of a friend, at least, its effects might be beneficial. I have observed, and that too with regret, that you cannot love, whatever be the character or the degree of your affection, without placing implicit reliance on its object. It is doubtless a noble fault, arising from a consciousness of your own sincerity, but it is a dangerous one, that must sooner or later infuse a double portion of gall into the inevitable cup of affliction."

"And yet," rejoined Clifford, "are you not acting in direct opposition to the sentiments you inculcate, and the principles of action you display, in the friendship you have avowed, and the trust you have placed in me?"

"No," replied the other eagerly, "I have frequently encountered envy, hatred, and tyranny in man, but hypocrisy and deceit are the more especial attributes of woman! It is she who loves to make a superior soul the sport of her caprice, and to degrade a higher intellect to a point far below her own. Oh how often have

I thought when gazing on some lovely form, or when recalling that which once stood unrivalled in the breathing world, that such beautiful fallacies, were only designed by heaven, as an evidence of the futility of all earthly expectations!"

They were both silent, and William appeared greatly distressed. "With what pleasure," he said, "did I anticipate this moment, and with what certainty did I calculate on your advice and sympathy! It is the first time, Dumont, you have disappointed me."

"You have my sympathy unasked, William," replied the prisoner, "and my counsels when you require them. If I have spoken in bitterness, attribute it to the revival of painful recollections, which are too vivid to be subdued either by time or retrospection. To-morrow we will renew this conversation, for the castle clock is cruelly audible, and De Brissac merits obedience from us both. Forgive me, William, if I have pained you," he added, "I had no such intention." He extended his hand, which his companion pressed sorrowfully, and left the garden.

The perturbed and anxious state of his mind did not prevent Clifford from fulfilling the prisoner's injunctions, and, when he met him the next morning, he acquainted Dumont that the



materials for writing were in his possession. No sooner had he given this information, than his eye was attracted by De Brissac, who entered the garden in conversation with another officer at that moment. William's heart beat quick; the dread of some counter-order relating to Dumont, with the probability of failure or delay, in whatever scheme the prisoner proposed, combining to annoy, and alarm him. Dumont read what was passing in his mind, and was not insensible to this silent proof of attachment. The general, however, merely saluted the friends in passing, and left the garden with his companion. Dumont then led Clifford to one particular spot which (as he had already ascertained) was not visible from any window in the castle, and there received the writing utensils from the hands of William. The latter watched with admiration the firmness of the writer's hand, as he traced, quickly, though calmly, a few words in a peculiar cipher, and then consigned the paper to his friend.

“When you leave me, William,” he said, go into the Rue ———; at the fifth door on the right hand side lives the Duke de P——.

You will find no difficulty in gaining admission by saying you come from the friend with whom he parted last in the corridor of the Tuileries. Immediately on seeing him deliver the note, and bring back any answer he may think fit to send ; but, above all, do not misjudge his timid, incredulous manner, for he is a sincere friend, and one who would risk much to serve me."

Clifford received these directions with earnest attention, and promised to execute them with precision. They then paced the terrace together for some moments ; but for the first time there was restraint between them. William could not forget the severe wound, which his pride (the pride of affection) had suffered, and he blamed himself for having exposed Blanch to depreciation. He maintained, therefore, a haughty silence as he walked by the side of Dumont, and yet, with the waywardness of human nature, he felt at that moment more than ever prepared to serve him, at any personal risk or inconvenience. The prisoner either did not remark his unusual manner, or he affected not to do so ; but after speaking for a short time, on indifferent subjects, he added, " I will request you, William, to proceed immediately on this errand. As I go to

my cell I will solicit De Brissac's permission to see you again on your return. But let me repeat once more, that, though of the utmost consequence to myself, the affair is of that nature, which the liberal-minded general himself would countenance, if the strict regulations of the fort, permitted any external communication."

William undertook the commission without hesitation, while his intimate acquaintance with the localities of Bordeaux brought him in a short time to the Rue de la ——. The door was opened by a servant in a variegated livery, who asked Clifford's business two or three times before the answer could penetrate through innumerable strata of powder and pomatum to a brain of no common solidity. He at length referred William to the duke's own valet, who now made his appearance in the shape of a scented *petit maître*. He regretted extremely, in bad English, that Monsieur should have had so much trouble, so long a walk (he looked fatigued), for no purpose, but Monseigneur had given strict orders no one was to be admitted, but the Duke de C—, the Marquis de B—, or the Prince de G—.

To do the man justice, he had, generally speaking, a discriminating eye, yet he was sorely puzzled by Clifford's appearance. The fact of his paying a visit of ceremony for the first time on foot, without equipage or retinue of any kind, counterbalanced, in the valet's estimation, the natural dignity of the young Englishman's manner. The more Clifford persisted, the more obstinately he denied him admission; till at length the former wrote a few words (the substance of Dumont's message) on a slip of paper, and begged it might be given to the duke. The valet, annoyed at his perseverance, grew insolent, and pushed it aside with little ceremony, saying that his grace had forbidden him to take in any petitions. The next moment, knocked down by one severe blow, he measured with his length the marble floor of the hall; and Clifford stepping coolly over his prostrate form, bade his terrified comrade deliver the paper, in a tone of authority which he durst not disobey.

He followed the servant up stairs, and was ushered with few preliminaries into the presence of the duke, who received him graciously. He was tall and well made, with the manners of one who had long been a resident in courts. His dress was

of the deepest mourning, and Clifford fancied there was something in his air slightly resembling Dumont. Not so the timidity with which he spoke, and the furtive glances he cast around him, as if fearful of being overheard. William began by apologizing to him, for the unprecedented manner in which he entered the house, but assured him that it was impossible to brook the insolence of his servant. The duke replied, by expressing his earnest wish, that the reception he met with from the master might efface the recollection of a rude menial whom he had so justly chastised. He then requested William to acquaint him with the nature of his errand, while the warmth and openness of the young man's manner, appeared to give him courage. He read the note with some emotion, and then turning to Clifford, inquired if the writer were known to him? In brief but comprehensive terms, William informed the duke of the origin of their acquaintance, and the intimacy and frequency of their subsequent interview.

The duke was greatly moved. "Great God," he said, "how incalculable are the chances of life! you will see him again to-morrow, perhaps to-day; and I—, tell me," he continued,

“is he well? Does not his noble nature yield beneath prolonged captivity? Is the magic of his eloquence unimpaired? Has his eye still the power of reading every secret thought?”

“Yes,” replied William; “and moreover he has had the art of attaching one, who, a few months ago was ignorant of that existence, to which his own is now closely bound. Words are vain, my lord, and friendship scorns profession, but to you I may say without reserve, that there are few risks I would not encounter, to serve one I love as a brother, and honour as a father.”

The duke listened with evident pleasure, and, as the eager young man concluded, he walked across the room, and, opening a writing-table, took out a small portrait. He then beckoned to Clifford, and inquired, in a low tone, “If it still resembled *him*.”

It was an exquisitely finished miniature, in the splendid dress of a courtier of Louis the Fourteenth’s time, with various military ensigns in the background, and an armorial shield, the bearings of which were effaced. William bent over the speaking features for some time, in silence.

“There is but a slight difference,” he replied ; “he is thinner now, and his hair is tinged with grey.”

“The duke sighed deeply, replaced the portrait, and, writing a few words in the same peculiar character on a piece of paper, gave it to Clifford.

“I will detain you no longer,” he said ; “but before we part let me adjure you, by all you hold sacred, not to betray this trust. On those few sentences may depend a life that should be preserved against some future day, when his ungrateful country once more acknowledges him as the noblest of her sons. You know not, you must not know,” he repeated, earnestly and emphatically, “whose life is in your hands !”

“My lord,” replied William, as he placed the paper in his bosom, “I do not ask ! What I already know is sufficient for me. Be under no anxiety ; the paper shall be conveyed.”

The duke pressed his hand. “I leave Bordeaux to-night,” he said, “but I trust we may one day meet again. In the mean time, farewell. Tell Gaston he lives in Albert’s heart.”

They parted ; and as Clifford again passed

through the streets of Bordeaux, the distance appeared interminable, and the salutations and greetings of his acquaintance were insupportable. Still he walked steadily on, while, with one hand concealed in his bosom, he grasped the paper with anxious firmness. But all was propitious ; a permission to see Dumont awaited him at the gates, and with all due speed he delivered the note, and gave him every particular of his audience of the duke, about whom Dumont expressed a corresponding interest, though with his wonted composure. The prisoner changed the subject instantly, however, as was always the case when the conversation turned for a moment towards himself, and, after a few words on other topics, he returned to the matter they had been discussing on the preceding day. His language had lost its acrimony ; his reasoning was mild ; and the gentleness of his voice and manner almost amounted to tenderness. He assured William that he had reflected deeply on the subject, and though he sincerely regretted that his friend had formed such an attachment, he was conscious of having given Clifford just cause of offence by his language. He now appeared willing to admit the possibility of



Blanch's superiority in some particulars, but had, he said, one question to put on that score.

"If your countrywoman does indeed possess all those noble and disinterested qualities which form the poet's notion of the love of woman, and if, as you seem convinced, her heart has never yet been given to another, why should she not bestow it upon one who loves her so devotedly, and what obstacle could the world then raise against your united affection?"

"Alas! Dumont," replied the other, sadly, "how often must I remind you that I am an exile, and that my scanty fortune barely enables me to appear as becomes the descendant of our house. Could I ask her, to whom the richest and noblest inhabitants of the province are paying their useless homage, to share with me the curse of a nameless wanderer? Might I not, by so doing, justly incur the derision of my rivals, the mockery of her ambitious relative, or the cold compassion of Blanch Courtenay? No, I must not dream of such a thing; for I dare not believe she loves me; I dare not believe that I possess the twofold blessings of friendship and love; but did any thing give me so bright a hope, oh, then, Dumont, no pre-

conceived scruple could withhold me from confessing how deeply and devotedly I love her !”

As he concluded, he looked appealingly towards the prisoner. Dumont shook his head, and again lamented William’s infatuation, but expressed his belief that the moment was passed when argument or counsel could bring conviction. He therefore urged William to determine his fate at once, recommending him, however, not to breathe a word relative to the prospect of succession, lest he should ever, in future years, suspect that this consideration weighed with her in the scale, or lest her expectations might never be realized.

“ Your happiness is at stake,” he exclaimed ; and either way decision is preferable to suspense. But if the misfortunes of your present situation prove the only barrier to the success of your suit, forget and despise her whose sordid nature prefers the advantages of material wealth to the riches of the mind, or whose pitiful ambition esteems the empty shadow of rank above the nobility of such a heart as yours.”

He paused, and, bidding William farewell, expressed his wish to see him, as usual, on the

morrow. As Clifford again left the fort, he encountered De Brissac, and his conscience smote him, when he recollected how comparatively seldom they now met. The old man, however, himself pleaded increase of duty, as an excuse for not having sought so much as formerly the delightful society of his young friend. There is no occasion on which we are more likely to receive an apology with indulgence, than when our conscience hints that the matter requires one from ourselves, and William was greatly relieved by finding the general did not lay the fault to his charge.

“To-night,” said De Brissac, “I am going to commit an act of which I have not been guilty since the first week you arrived here. But Madame D’Aubry’s invitation is couched in peremptory terms, and ‘*Honneur et les dames*’ has always been the device of the De Brissacs. Besides, it is long since I have seen ‘*La belle Anglaise*,’” he added, looking archly into William’s face, “and I am not so blind to her charms as she most probably is to mine.” He smiled significantly. “The Cliffords have always chosen their brides well,” he continued; “your mother, William, was the fairest of the day.”

CHAPTER VI.

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THE day had passed in a very different manner with William and Blanch, and yet it had been one of feverish excitement to both. Madame D'Aubry's preparations for the evening's fête, which was for the moment the chief subject of expectation in Bordeaux, were too engrossing to allow her to wonder at, or even remark, the abstraction of her niece, of whom nevertheless her thoughts were full. For her, the fête was given; to gratify her tastes, as Madame D'Aubry conceived them (though her ideas of Blanch's taste were not always the most correct) all particulars were arranged; and if ever Madame D'Aubry calculated for an instant on the pleasure, or the glory she herself might derive, every selfish feeling was quickly swallowed up

in the thought of her niece's triumph. She knew that few—in her opinion, indeed, none—could compete with Blanch in beauty, and to enhance the loveliness for which she anticipated such universal admiration, she resolved to relinquish her most costly jewels, a sacrifice of her own magnificence which plainly indicated the strength of her affection. In the mean time Blanch suffered the preparations to proceed without taking even that happy interest therein, that the young unoccupied heart feels in matters which, if considered seriously, might seem trifling and idle. She suffered her aunt to arrange the whole, without even a word of remonstrance from her own better taste, and even allowed her to dictate in regard to that important point,—so seldom yielded by woman to the direction of any one else,—her own dress and appearance. It was not that Blanch looked forward with careless indifference to the approaching evening; but it was, on the contrary, that her whole mind was occupied with the thought of events which might or might not occur, on that very occasion:—events on which depended how her future life was to flow on, whether as a stream which, clear and bright,

may be dashed indeed from rock to rock, and fretted by a thousand obstacles, but still retains the sparkling of never dying hope ; or as a current dull and heavy, stealing on perhaps to all eyes in calm tranquillity, but yet mingled at its fountain with some dark and sombre matter, which stains all its course with the same gloomy hue. Her feelings towards her lover had assumed, since last we saw her, a far more decided character ; the absence of William had first surprised, and then wounded her, and as she now viewed the preparations, and listlessly replied to her aunt's repeated questions, she could no longer hide from herself, that it depended on him alone, to convert the fairy scene Madame D'Aubry's house was about to exhibit, into a reality of enchantment, or reduce it to a mere childish pageant. A continual presentiment haunted her, that a crisis in her fate was approaching, and she feared lest William should seize the opportunity of virtually relinquishing all claim to her hand, by absenting himself from the fête, or benefit by the crowd to manifest his indifference, so as to be observed by her alone. Blanch loved ! and the conviction that she did so, without the certainty of being beloved in

return, could not subdue the passion of her heart. She loved ! to others the fact might be a matter of no moment, an epoch of no interest. But to her, it was the fulfilment of her heart's dream, the accomplishment of its prophecies. The ideal world which she had created for herself, peopled with fairy beings, and endowed with all the shadowy charms of imagination, was like some fertile garden, on which nature and art have alike lavished their bounties. But he who walks alone, even amid such real scenes of fascination, pines for an associate in his pleasures, a companion whose heart will expand in all the sympathy of enjoyment ; and thus did Blanch feel amid the beings of her own fancy. Until the moment she had seen William, the gates of her intellectual paradise had been closed, and though she loved to wander in this region of her own creation, rather than amid all the cold realities of life, Blanch had often felt and acknowledged the insufficiency of its solitude, and now lingered on the threshold to admit him, whom her choice had qualified for entrance. The evening which was now approaching was to prove, she fancied, whether he would be a willing guest, and she awaited the ap-

pointed hour, with an anxiety in no degree inferior to that of her aunt, but of a very different nature.

The taste for pageantry, and quaint devices, which our remote ancestors so dearly loved, had by no means as yet become extinct. Kings and princes still danced in ballets, and performed parts in allegories, and Madame D'Aubry who had resolved that her fête should exhibit royal magnificence spared no pains to approach the formal and fantastic arrangements of Versailles. Scarcely had the shades of evening begun to prevail, when the exterior of the Hotel D'Aubry presented a brilliant mass of illumination, while a military guard at once adorned and defended the gates. Every thing appeared to be conducted on a new scale, not a servant was in attendance, but the guests passed through a long corridor, the sides of which were lined with beautiful plants, until they arrived before a portico, over which was an illuminated inscription, "*Salle de Junon.*" The folding doors then flew open and discovered the hostess seated on an elevation at the upper end of the room, attended by various nymphs, some subaltern deities, and a brace



of peacocks, which bore a most respectably natural appearance. It might be questioned, if

“ The Empress of Heaven,  
The Goddess of the majestic eyes,”

would have been perfectly satisfied with the personal charms of her representative ; but certain it is, that Juno herself might have envied the splendour of her namesake’s attire, or bartered the cloudy glories of Olympus, for the substantial magnificence of the “ Salle de Junon.”

There were several passages branching from the central apartment, which led to the dominions of various deities, but it was not until the greater part of the society was assembled, that the orchestra commenced a low symphony. Immediately a winged boy descended from the ceiling, and alighted before a large curtain, at the extremity of the room. He waved his hand, and as the veil rose slowly the little god led the way into the “ *Bosquet de Diane*.” It was a scene of perfect and beautiful deception, a vista consisting of an avenue of natural trees, dimly lighted by small green lamps, which hung like glow-worms on the branches, was terminated

by a tree of superior growth, over which shone a crescent moon. Silently, almost breathlessly, did the crowd follow their childish guide, who on arriving at the termination of the avenue, climbed the tree with alacrity, and nestling among the boughs, pointed to the turning of the gallery and declared his errand completed, and his power at an end. All eyes were fixed intently on a moving machine of material clouds which cleared away, and discovered a scene that must have equalled every expectation, even in that age of pomp and splendour. In a cavern glittering with stalactites, and verdant with moss, down whose rocky side flowed a limpid stream, reposed the goddess Diana. Her couch was composed of a tiger skin, and at her feet crouched two large stag-hounds, while in the distance, a youthful nymph was caressing and pacifying a half startled gazelle. The attendants of the goddess, who were many and well chosen, were grouped in different parts of the cavern; and as the whole scene met the sight, an unanimous shout burst from the admiring spectators, and the representative of Diana, with a timidity that was celestial in nothing but grace, stepped forward to greet her

most distinguished guests, and to admit them to her sanctuary.

She was dressed with taste more pure than was usual in those times; for although the whole scene had been arranged by Madame D'Aubry and an artist of great celebrity in Bordeaux, without any opposition on the part of Blanch, yet her own good judgment had silently banished from her person, every thing that was absurd or anomalous, in the French costume of the day. A robe of emerald velvet was looped above the ankle, by two large gems, her long and luxuriant hair hung in golden waves over her shoulders, and a circlet and crescent of diamonds glittered on her forehead. Her bow and quiver were curiously wrought in silver, and the sandal which displayed the perfect modelling of her foot and ankle, was of the same material. Corresponding with the cavern, on the opposite side, was another recess in which stood the altar of Diana, surmounted by a fawn beautifully executed in marble, and encircled by a hedge of evergreens, which formed a pleasing retreat from the glare and heat of the lamps.

The gallantry of the Bordellois was exercised during the evening, in the various offerings

which were placed on the altar. Wreaths of significant flowers, and garlands of *immortelles*, from whence many a billet protruded, and amid whose leaves an occasional gem glittered, were suspended on the neck of the sculptured animal. The crowd was so dense, that Blanch could scarcely distinguish one person from another, until the Prince de C—— stepped forward and led her into the ball-room. He was a foreigner of distinction, who had only that day arrived in Bordeaux, and claimed an unquestioned right of precedence.

Dazzled by the transition from darkness to light, half dizzy with the sudden apparition of so many people; but above all, trembling from inward excitement, Blanch took the prince's arm, in passive silence, and stood by his side several moments before she could bring herself to speak—when she did so, her remarks were but ill assorted with the deep and all engrossing nature of the thoughts that occupied her mind. Now her eye wandered hurriedly over the moving mass before her, while her heart sickened with disappointment as she examined every part of the room, but in vain. Now as a fresh group of people passed in review, she experi-

enced a reluctance to convince herself, *he* was not among them, while occasionally an apprehension that the prince might detect her anxiety, called back her glance, and fixed it on the ground. In vain did she try to appease the storm within, in vain did she recal the memory of those placid moments, when every object was viewed through the calm medium of a mind at ease. Mortified at the failure of every attempt at self-command, Blanch tortured herself by dwelling on the possibility of William's indifference, but the whispers of pride, were drowned by the voice of newly-awakened passion. The modesty of her nature shrunk beneath the consciousness of being a slave to feelings, whose intensity she believed could only be palliated, by the certainty that they were mutual. All this, and much more passed within the little world of Blanch's breast, as she stood with a hundred eyes upon her, by the side of the prince, and mechanically followed the intricate figures of the dance. Little did he or any one there know of the secret workings, which brought the blood to her cheek, and then left it colourless, which compressed her lips, lest her tongue should prove traitor, and which gave her young eye a restless and anxious

expression very different from the glance of tranquil enjoyment. The prince could not fail to observe the peculiarity of her manner, and the unconnected strain both of her observations and replies, but in his mind it was easily accounted for. Her confusion might be the natural consequence of the honour conferred on her, by dancing with him! He thought, however, that she had recovered herself wonderfully, when she asked him quite calmly to conduct her to the balcony.

“I am already fatigued,” she said, smiling, “and my cavern was not so cool, as you might conceive from the petrifications which adorn it.”

The Hotel D'Aubry boasted an extensive façade, with an ample supply of windows, every two of which appropriated a verandah to themselves. The heat had induced many of the guests to seek the open air, the lamps were casting a blaze over the whole front of the building, multitudes of the common people were gazing up from the street, and multitudes of maskers were thronging amongst the shrubs, which decorated the wide balconies. The prince and his fair companion, lingered to remark the contrast of the scene without and that within, and

to admire the indistinct outline of all the varieties of costume. But they both became silent, as they heard a few preparatory notes from the strings of a guitar; and a rich low voice singing immediately followed. They endeavoured to discover the singer, but from the sound, he appeared to be in the last balcony, and the number of intervening objects entirely concealed him.

## THE EXILE'S HOME.

“ My Home ! my Home ! ” in grief I cried,  
When first I left its shore,  
And unknown regions far and wide  
Were spread my path before.  
“ Though Nature in a lovelier guise  
May shed her gifts around,  
And History's classic visions rise  
To consecrate the ground,  
Oh give me back my Home,” I cried,  
And take the universe beside !

For oh, it is a curse for me,  
With aimless views to roam,  
Where all I feel, and hear, and see,  
Proclaim me far from Home.”  
’Twas thus I mourn’d my hapless plight,  
As wide my footsteps stray’d,  
When lo, on my enraptured sight  
A heavenly Iris play’d ;  
And love, and hope, with hues combined,  
Dispersed the shadows of my mind.

No more I mourn with bitter tears  
The land that gave me birth,  
Where'er thou art henceforth appears  
My native spot of earth !  
The pathless wild, the desert sand,  
The rock in barren pride—  
I'll hail them as my own dear land,  
When thou art by my side,  
Nor ever, ever ask to roam,  
While in thy heart I find my home !

Blanch, with her cheek resting upon her hand, leaned upon the balustrade, drinking in every sound, and perfectly heedless of the Prince de C—'s presence, although he condescended to express his approbation, both of the voice and the exquisite taste of the minstrel, and even borrowed his poetry to address some well-turned compliment to the fair goddess. But she could not answer him, for in that brief moment she had drunk deeply of the warm chalice of hope, and the intoxicating draught almost unfitted her for the cold exercise of ceremony. In another instant Blanch's agitation would have been exposed to the eyes of her companion : she felt the importance of the moment, and with a strong exertion of resolution, and subduing every sign of the inward struggle, she re-entered the room, and was again



led forward to dance. Complaining of fatigue, however, she afterwards declined every pressing solicitation, and removed as far as possible from the mass of the crowd; but it was difficult for her to find the retirement that she wished. By degrees, however, she made her wish to be alone evident; and indeed it was easy to believe that the excitement and exertion she had undergone, rendered a short interval of quiet, necessary. One by one she dismissed the train of dangles, and remained standing in the recess of a window, occasionally turning her head to gaze down into the street, occasionally letting her eyes wander listlessly round the apartment. Suddenly they were attracted by a young man in the dress of a Provençal troubadour, whom she had not before observed; and yet he was one who could not pass unnoticed. He carried his “cithern” across his shoulder, and, in accordance with the character he had assumed, wore a short tunic of violet-coloured velvet, bordered with miniver; but his hose and bonnet were of a full rich crimson. A gold chain and medallion were the only ornaments of his costume, excepting one large jewel that clasped his plume, and was surmounted by a faded rose.

It was not his dress alone, however, which distinguished him from the crowd, or occasioned the interest with which Blanch regarded him. Tall and well-proportioned, an unstudied grace pervaded his whole frame, and lent itself to the slightest movement of every limb. His hair was of a peculiar shade of brown, but the eyebrows decidedly black, while the outline of his head and features, though purely classical, did not partake of that cold regularity which is too often a scanty substitute for expression. On the brow of her favourite child, the partial hand of nature had inscribed, in legible characters, the double aristocracy of mind and body, while the beaming countenance was as noble as the heart from which its radiance emanated. His unquestionable beauty, however, and the perfect taste of his costume, were not sufficient of themselves to detach him completely from the bulk of an assemblage where magnificence was profuse, and personal graces not uncommon: yet to Blanch, who now recognised him, he appeared to stand in visible relief from the multitude, alone and unapproached, though surrounded by hundreds. How dissimilar were the feelings thus excited from the cold admiration, with which the eye of

indifference rests on mere external beauty! With Blanch, it was the heart, that led the eye captive in its own chosen direction. There was for her but one group in the apartment—that in which he stood: there seemed to her but one single guest in her aunt's crowded ball-room, and that one was William Clifford!

At this moment his eye caught hers, and he advanced towards the spot where she was standing. Blanch's head swam, the lights danced before her eyes, and under the impulse of the moment she would have given worlds to have avoided him, to whom every thought of the evening had been dedicated. She felt as if he could read those thoughts: she felt he might despise them. Again and again she struggled, and called up every incentive to self-possession, till she acquired it, in a degree; she even forced a smile of unmeaning courtesy on her features, and by the time he stood by her side, was comparatively calm and collected.

William addressed her in character, with the assurance, that the fame of her beauty alone had called him from the shades of his native Provence, whose sons still excelled in the “joyeuse science.” She answered him in the same strain,

and accepting his proffered arm, walked on by his side for some moments in silence.

It happened at that instant that the announcement of some new and astonishing attraction, in the shape of an enchanted castle, a speaking bird, or a singing fountain, drew the eager throng away in one direction; but Blanch, to whom the machinery of the entertainment was well known, expressed no desire to follow.

Without question or reply, therefore, they turned down the Bosquet de Diane, which was cooler, and at this moment quite deserted; and as they did so, Blanch, to break the silence, inquired for Dumont.

“We were together this morning,” answered Clifford; “and our conversation was long, and to me, deeply interesting, for we spoke of you!”

“Of me?” faltered Blanch, with her breath checked, and her eyes chained to the ground.  
“Of me? —”

“Yes,” replied Clifford, eagerly; “it is Dumont that has urged me to this: it is the implicit confidence which I place in his opinion, that has persuaded me to risk my last dream of happiness. But now at least it is too late to retract—my confession must be made, and I

confess it as I would a crime, Blanch!—I have dared to love you—dared to lift my eyes, my hopes, my thoughts to you! Speak,” he continued, in a tremulous voice, as she remained silent, “for every moment is a century! Say that you scorn me—that you hate me. No upbraiding word, no uttered reproach shall ever reach your ear; nor shall the object of your anger ever cross your path again; but in mercy speak to me, for suspense is maddening—Blanch—the devotion of my whole life is yours—I have nothing more to offer!”

He knelt before her, and his agitation was distressing to witness. Blanch leaned her head against the cold marble of the altar, and moved her lips, but without articulation: her bosom heaved, and large single tears fell heavily from her eyes. William took the hand that fell by her side, and again called on her by name. She suffered it to lay motionless in his for a moment, and then, with the joy of doubt removed overpowering every thing else, she turned slowly towards him, exclaiming, “William! my own, own William!—”

He clasped her to his breast, and it was some moments before she could disengage herself from his impassioned embrace.

“ William,” she then said, smiling through the tears that now flowed peaceably, although the crimson blood coloured her cheek and forehead, “ you judged me better than to think I could find sufficiency in the vanity of such a scene as this. There,” she continued, pointing to the garlands, that hung upon the altar, “ if the weakness of my sex inspired a momentary triumph, it was only in the thought of being worthy of you. The beauty they extol I now rejoice in: the riches that I once contemned I now covet. Alas, I have them not, William! but at least I can offer you a soul to appreciate yours, and a heart that can love—ay, as devotedly as your own,” she added, half confused, half playfully, “ though my glance be not so eloquent—nor so hard to sustain !”

William’s gaze was indeed rivetted on the beautiful being, before him, but for some time his happiness could not vent itself in words. At length, waking from the enchanted dream into which he had fallen, he raised the small hand, that still lay in his, and pressed it eagerly to his lips. Then with all the passionate tenderness of a heart running over with fresh joy, he poured forth his tale of hope and fear in a torrent of eloquence flowing from the united

sources of truth and affection. Nor did the noble-minded youth forget to recal to the mind of her he loved, that he was an exile and a wanderer.

She heard him to the end, with her hand still pressed in his, and her eyes bowed beneath the ardour of his gaze; but when he spoke of exile, she answered him in the words of his own well-remembered song.

It is in moments such as these that the "deep ideal river," suddenly swelled from a thousand newly opened sources, seems to overflow its boundaries, bearing down every thing in its course, and giving its own bright hue to all over which it pours: it is in moments such as these, that the imagination cancels her arrears with the heart, and exults in the realization of their united visions: it is in moments such as these, that we hang as it were upon the wings of Time, to impede his cruel progress, and wonder at his reluctance to prolong a period of such ecstasy. They were both deeply impressed with the value of that moment: they were both fully persuaded that whatever might be the event of their future lives, that moment would still remain a bright

beacon, in the track of retrospection, a brilliant star, in the constellation of memory, on which they might gaze in common. The scene, the hour, the silence, all added their component magic to heighten the enchantment, and brought every fascination, that could excite the young and eager mind to that emotion, against which it is guarded in more cold and stately hours. Blanch returned the ardour of William's gaze, with one of subdued tenderness; and as she leaned her blushing face upon his shoulder, she trembled at the joy, that was attended by such agitation. Yet she was the first to recover herself, and enjoining secrecy and discretion for the time, begged he would not excite suspicion by the frequency of his visits, until she had found a proper moment to confide in Madame D'Aubry.

She had scarcely given this caution, when they were startled by the sound of hurried footsteps, and leaving the bower by the opposite direction, regained the ball-room.



CHAPTER VII.

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It must ever be a strange and mysterious feeling to the young heart, when it wakes to the certainty of being beloved, and recollects itself in possession of that treasure, which had been the object of ambition for all its imaginative hopes, the brightest point in all its dreams. In such a moment, the host of wandering thoughts, and undefined feelings, are called home, and the wearied affections, having found all that they sought, lull themselves to repose, while gazing on the mighty prize they have won. Oh! there is a transport in the knowledge, that our every look, our every word, has an echo in another bosom; there is a joy that baffles description, in the thought that all we value, that all we possess, be they virtues, be they talents, be they Fortune's gifts, may be consecrated by bestowing them on another. The mind, exulting in its wealth, loves to ponder over its newly-gained possession; and he who from comparative obscurity, finds him-

self suddenly elevated to the highest earthly honours, could not experience a prouder sensation, than did Blanch when on awakening, she recalled the events of the preceding evening, and dwelt with ecstasy on the thought, that she was loved by him whom she had already chosen from all the world beside. In her own esteem, the humble-minded Blanch rose, as she reflected on the high place, that she enjoyed in that of William; for her estimate was not formed or biassed by the world's opinion, and she assigned William at least his proper grade, in the scale of creation—if she assigned him more, must we marvel?

Dazzled by the radiance, which love had shed over the prospect of her future life, it was some time before her mental eye became sufficiently familiar with its brightness, to discover many less pleasing objects, which that prospect also contained. Obstacles there were, high and formidable barriers on the path before her, dark and mysterious tracts in the landscape, whose gloomy colouring baffled penetration, and appeared to forbode both difficulty and danger. Such variety indeed might enhance the charms of a scene in the substantial world, and yet, when the weary pilgrim surveys from some

commanding eminence, the country he purposes to traverse, and with eyes which anxiety has quickened, discovers the long wished-for shrine in the distance, oh! does he not calculate, with painful anxiety, on mountain, rock, or stream, that may still intervene, to obstruct his journey towards that spot where all his hopes are centred?

It was in this spirit that Blanch, after a long train of thought, began to consider many perplexing circumstances, and, amongst others, the mystery which hung round Clifford, and his family. He had occasionally mentioned his parents as dead, and his uncle as living in Italy; he had called himself an exile also, without assigning any cause for absenting himself from a country, of which he always spoke in terms, of the highest admiration.

Blanch's affection, would have been indignant at the bare idea of coupling mistrust, with the thought of William Clifford, yet she regretted that such facts existed, dreading lest any hidden obstacle should exist to prevent their union. She strove to recal the slightest allusion, that had been made in her presence to any circumstance respecting Clifford, but could only remember how often he had told her that he knew

no one, on his arrival at Bordeaux. General de Brissac was the person who had presented the young Englishman, at the Hotel D'Aubry, as the nephew of an acquaintance, travelling for his amusement; and when William's reign of favour first began, the fair Bordelloises, who honoured him with their notice, were pleased to style him, "*Le b  l Inconnu*," which appeared to favour the idea of mystery.

Yet to Blanch's confiding and enthusiastic nature there was satisfaction in the risk, that proved the implicit trust she placed in him; and with that confidence, which is inseparable from the love of woman, she believed that Clifford had some excellent reason for secrecy.

The dread of her aunt's dismay weighed still heavier on her mind, for although she had never participated in Madame D'Aubry's schemes of ambition, the uniform kindness of that lady entitled her to gratitude, and Blanch was sincerely grieved at the prospect of giving her pain. She well understood the workings of her aunt's mind, although it were perhaps impossible to find one shade of resemblance with her own, and she was fully aware that Clifford was one of the last people that Madame D'Aubry would have selected as her niece's husband.

It is true she had often called him the handsomest and most agreeable of all their guests, and never omitted him in any invitation, however limited as to numbers, while she spoke of him as her favourite and her handsome countryman, and appeared more pleased with his attentions, than those of any other young man in Bordeaux. That Blanch should prefer his society, appeared natural; that she should marry him, never entered Madame D'Aubry's head. That William should admire Blanch, was, in that worthy lady's opinion, merely according to the common course of events, and agreeable to the prevailing fashion; but that he should aspire to her hand, perfectly incongruous; besides which, Madame D'Aubry had so often jested with Blanch, on the obduracy of her heart, and the coldness of her feelings, that this prudent lady, was perfectly at ease upon that score. Blanch knew all this, and foresaw the deep despair, that a communication of their mutual attachment would cause. It was a comfort, that she might delay the painful explanation, and once more turning to the bright side of the picture, she listened with eagerness, to the sweet whispers of hope.

With William, it was otherwise; the surprise,

the transport, of being loved by Blanch, and loved too with an ardour that rivalled his own, silenced all those minor trials and vexations, that had previously disturbed his mind. He did not forget that difficulties existed, but he was aware of their extent, and strong in the knowledge of reciprocal affection, he no longer regarded them as insurmountable. Blanch was his, his by the kiss she had permitted, his by the pressure of that hand, and the vow of those lips, which had never breathed a word of love till then, and he prepared to trample upon circumstances to obtain her.

Remembering Blanch's injunctions, he overcame, his impatience to visit the Hotel D'Aubry, on the morning after the masquerade, and turned his steps eagerly in the direction of the prison. William was one, who rarely bestowed his confidence, but when he did so, it was unlimited ; he had now no secrets from Dumont on any subject ; and that on which his mind was at present set, was one in which he fancied the prisoner himself must necessarily be interested, after all that had passed between them, relative to Blanch. Moreover, William reflected, that when his heart was laden with doubt and sorrow, he had sought comfort in the sympathy of Dumont, and now

that it was overcharged with joy, he longed to deposit its sweet burden, in the same friendly resting-place. He also wished to consult with Dumont, on the steps which he should next take, and upon the letter, which he must address to his uncle, the Chevalier Clifford, a composition requiring infinite delicacy. But he was destined to disappointment, for on arriving at the gate, the sentinel informed him, that no one was to be admitted that morning. He turned away vexed and mortified, and was at a loss where to bend his steps. Fortunately, the thought suggested itself, that he might walk to the Hotel D'Aubry, and inquire after the health of its inmates without entering, and consequently without failing in his promise to Blanch. He found Madame D'Aubry's coach, at the door, and hurried forward to tender his services, in assisting her to enter the carriage. The good lady smiled sweetly upon him.

"We are going on an early expedition to-morrow, Mr. Clifford," she said, "to see a terre of mine on the hill; we have a place for you in the coach, and you will find us at breakfast about eight."

William bowed his grateful assent, endeavouring at the same time to look as unconcerned as

he possibly could on the occasion, and with a ceremonious inquiry after Blanch, he walked home, thinking how best he might accelerate the movements of the next few hours; while he penned a few hasty lines to the governor, begging him to acquaint Dumont with the cause of his absence. The evening passed, the night came, the morning dawned at length, and William after having tasted but little sleep, rose nevertheless with feelings as fresh, and as bright, as the day, whose dawning rays streamed through his half closed shutters, and roused him, with a promise of joy.

He found the guests already assembled at the Hotel D'Aubry. After saluting the company on his entry, he scanned them anxiously. The eternal Stanley, was destined to make the fourth in Madame D'Aubry's coach; but La Marquise de Beaulieu who had previously volunteered a carriage full of recruits, was escorted singly by the Prince de C—. She was "desolée," but it could not be helped, there was some fête going on, she had no idea of, and but for the prince's compassion she would have been quite abandoned. "Poor woman," whispered Stanley to William, "what an uncalled-for apology, what a tedious account of her successful endeavours, at a tête-à-tête!"



Nor had Mr. Stanley's usual insight into the human character failed him on this occasion. The departure of the prince (the reigning Lion in Bordeaux) had been announced for that day, and Madame de Beaulieu had with difficulty induced him to defer his journey—but she had taken pains to spread the report that this illustrious foreigner had himself solicited a seat in her carriage.

The marquise, although many years younger, was the sworn friend of Madame D'Aubry. One of those people who are called pretty, by courtesy, she was the great promoter of society, the great patroness of milliners in Bordeaux; and by dint of dressing, talking, flirting and giving dinners, Madame de Beaulieu, became a beauty, nay—some people went so far as to call her a *bel esprit*. Her great ambition, however, was the rumour of singularity: she practised none of those languishing airs that were then in fashion; and never boasted of delicate health, or shrieked at the sight of an insect. Vivacity and activity were her forte; she loved enterprise, and scorned fatigue, could walk miles without weariness; and lost her sleep during three whole nights from simple pleasure at

hearing some one say, “ Cette petite Marquise, comme elle est mignonne, et eveillée !”

No sooner were the carriages in motion than Madame D'Aubry began a long account of the object of their expedition, informing her friends — That last year she was looking over some accounts with her steward, and that Blanch, who assisted her therein, was struck with some well-sounding names, and asked one or two questions about the estates, which Madame D'Aubry found it difficult to answer. The steward was, however, better informed on these points, and he had given Blanch so wonderful a description of a *terre*, belonging to the D'Aubry property, containing an old castle, a holy well, and many other remarkable things, that the said Blanch had earnestly entreated her aunt to visit the spot.

“ And when we did so,” continued Madame D'Aubry, “ no sooner had we toiled up to the top, for it is at the summit of a high hill, than my madcap niece almost bound me down to promise, I would build up a half crazy tower, and make a few rooms habitable, as a retreat in the summer months. We have neither of us thought much about it since, I believe, till

yesterday, when she insisted on going there again, and I thought it best to comply before the hot weather sets in, very sure I should yield sooner or later. But this time I have taken upon myself to guard against hunger and weariness, and also to provide myself with a few sage counsellors, to preserve me from falling blindly into any of Blanch's 'mad schemes.'” The good lady smiled as she concluded this long speech, and pressed her niece's hand.

After proceeding along the road for some miles, the carriages stopped, and the party alighting, found several mules in readiness at the foot of the hill. The marquise declared that she was not alarmed, but still her inexperience rendered the prince's vigilance necessary, and he rode accordingly by her side. Stanley discreetly walked by the bridle rein of Madame D'Aubry; and as Blanch declared she preferred walking, Clifford consigned their two mules to the care of a little guide, and followed the riders at some distance; but ere long the pedestrians verged off into a smaller path, which seemed to lead more directly up the side of the hill.

It was a glorious morning, ushering in the month of April; that sweet, though wayward

child of Spring, who, like some youthful and capricious beauty, loves to display by turns the varying mood of infancy, and the more settled aspect of maturer years. On this day, however, there was nothing changeable or vacillating in her humour, when, assuming the air of her more favoured sister, May, she bade fair to rival her in all bright gifts. It was, in fact, one of those foretastes of the “sweete seasonne” which occasionally dawn upon the early part of the year, springing up suddenly like some vision of beauty that crosses the traveller’s path when least he looks for such, and fading as rapidly from the view. It was one of those prophecies of summer, which stimulate our eagerness for that happy time, till we almost fancy it within our grasp, but like that anticipation whereof such days are emblems, too often far lovelier, far more genial than the reality—one felt that it might be a messenger whose promises exceeded their authority, and who bestowed a pledge that might never be redeemed. It was indeed a lovely morning, the sun coveting the power that would shortly be his, infused a warmth and vigour into his rays that drew a balmy exhalation from the sweet

nosegay of plants and flowers which the earth carried concealed in her bosom.

The birds sang—sang as if the rush of harmony would burst the little tube through which it passed; and as they plumed themselves on the still leafless branches, the vegetable world alone seemed to linger behind the hasty march of spring. Yet here and there a single bud protruded from the hedges, as if anxious to prove its individual zeal, while the soft fresh breeze of morning was laden at intervals with the fragrance of the hidden violet, which (like true benevolence) exercises in secret, its sweet and grateful influence. How lovely was that poetry which first assigned the same emblematic hue to Spring and Hope; that could read of eternal promise in the opening page of nature, and blend in sweet confusion varied, the joys of anticipation!

Blanch walked by the side of William, while exercise, and the tenour of her thoughts, brought a fresh glow to her cheek, and a brighter sparkle to her eye. At first, when leaning on her lover's arm to recover her breath, she would direct his attention to some striking point of view, in order to divert his

mind from that exciting theme which gave an ardour to his looks and language, that alarmed while it pleased her. By degrees, however, this slight agitation subsided beneath the charm of his society, while Clifford felt happier than he had hitherto believed within the grasp of humanity. With such a being at his side, with such a scene before him, could it be conceived that any gloomy forebodings would make their way into his mind? Oh, no! all was spring for them; the spring of nature, of love, and life; and as William stooped to gather the snowdrop, or twine the crocus and violet for Blanch's flowing hair, it seemed as if the flowers sprang to life for them. The happy disposition of Blanch, which had lately been obscured by doubt and sorrow, once more imparted its bright colouring to her manner and conversation; and the buoyant elasticity of her spirits gave her more than ordinary strength and courage. She trod the most rugged paths over the uneven ground, making her way with a fearlessness that excited more admiration in their little guide in the distance, than in William, who, as he followed with a swift, though firm step, dreaded every moment lest she should miss her

footing. She smiled at his fears, and assured him she was as expert a mountaineer as himself, although she had not the same experience.

“We must arrive before them at the fount of St. Estelle, dear William,” she said, “and breathe for a few moments, lest they should suppose I am fatigued. I know the way well, for I have been here before; and I remember envying my guide for finding so short a road as this. But here we are; is it not a lovely resting-place?”

As she spoke, they came suddenly upon a small plain, backed by a steep bank, and skirted, on one side, by a clump of trees (which ascending the hill, terminated in a wood), and, on the other, by the bridle-road that led to the castle. In the centre stood a small Gothic screen of stonework, round which nature had twined many a fantastic garland of ivy, while the sunbeams danced and sparkled on a little spring, that gushed from the rock, and bounding over its stony basin, wandered through the grass, or forming itself into a thousand tiny rills, meandered down the shelving sward. The water, exquisitely transparent, rendered its immediate neighbourhood peculiarly verdant, while flowers that could not be found elsewhere, grew luxuriantly beneath its fertiliz-

ing influence. There was a wild solemn music too in the welling of that sacred fountain ; for such we may call it, as the spot was hallowed, and the rude, half effaced inscription still bade the passing traveller pray for the soul of "SAINTE ESTOILE."

"Here let us rest, dear William !" exclaimed Blanch ; "for we can watch the riders, and join them before they reach the castle. The last time we were here, I was quite enchanted with this fountain, and my enthusiasm so much delighted the guide, that he immediately poured forth upon me the legend of the holy martyr from whom it takes its name."

"Will you not let me share it too, dear Blanch," said her companion ; "the riders will not be here for some time, and I who love old legends would fain hear it ; but above all from your lips."

She smiled. "I question," she replied, "if I can do justice to the subject, for the man had a flow of natural eloquence which I do not possess ; but you will be an indulgent critic, and I will do my best."

She began timidly, but gained courage as she proceeded, to relate



## THE LEGEND OF SAINTE ESTELLE.

“ ‘ We are told that in the olden time, when the blessed truths of Christianity were still regarded with horror, in these parts of the world, the governor of the city, had an only daughter, whose beauty and excellence were the general theme of admiration and praise. Her name was Estelle, or Estoile, and the poetic appellations of the Star of the Province, the Light of the City, will but convey a feeble idea of the fame which her charms had already gained. But suddenly a change came over the beautiful girl: her voice no longer cheered the banquet; her form no longer glided in the dance: she shunned the society of man; she avoided even the presence of her father, and spent whole days in solitude. The governor questioned, entreated, menaced; but all in vain: the only reply—the only explanation he could gain, was, that her tastes and opinions were altered. Unaccustomed to be thus thwarted, the angry parent sent for the Lady Estelle’s confidential attendant, and heard from the lips of the trembling servant, that her young mistress walked forth daily alone, and returned at the

expiration of several hours, weary and foot-sore. Strengthened in his preconceived suspicions, the governor's first impulse was to seek his child, and accuse her at once of guilt and shame. But his fury suggested a surer path: he hovered round that wing of the palace, in which Estelle's private apartments lay, and saw her issue forth alone towards the dusk of evening. He followed her with feelings that could not be described, as threading the mazes of the city she passed the gates, and walked many miles in this direction without slackening her pace. The warrior hastened after her in astonishment, as she ascended the steepest paths with almost supernatural speed, and at length arrived before a fountain, where, seeing that she paused, he concealed himself in such a manner, that he might observe and hear all that passed. The moon was nearly full, but there were flitting clouds in the sky, that occasionally obscured her light. At this moment she shone brightly upon Estelle, who, casting off her loose dark mantle, appeared in a flowing robe of dazzling whiteness, crowned with a garland of flowers, and wearing a massive cross of gold upon her beautiful bosom. The father thought his Estelle had

never looked so fair, as when kneeling by the spring, she tasted one draught of its refreshing waters, and then folding her arms across her breast, began a low chant; pausing at intervals to gaze anxiously around, as if awaiting the arrival of some one. When the governor heard once more, the voice he so dearly loved, that had so often enlivened his banquet, and cheered his gloomy moments, the stern heart within him melted. But that voice had a chastened tone, a more subdued character than he had ever heard before; and hark! a rustling among the leaves—the steps of a man descend the rock—and Estelle rises eagerly and walks forward. Her father grasped his dagger, and looked forth from his hiding-place! But the moon was hid, and he could discern nothing, but a tall dark outline amid the trees.

“‘Art thou come at last?’ exclaimed the sweet voice of Estelle. ‘I have tarried long for thee; but lo, I am here to sacrifice all—my home, my kindred, and my faith, for the sake of one—!’

“‘Die then!’ cried the infuriated father, as he sprang forward, and buried his dagger deep in her bosom. ‘Die! ere thou glory in thy infamy, or bring dishonour on thy father’s name!’

“ Estelle’s dying glance recognised her murderer ! she waved her hand, and the stranger to whom she had spoken stood beside her in the open moonlight.

“ The governor raised his eyes from the expiring form of his daughter, to him, whom he believed her guilty paramour. It was an aged man, whose garb bespoke him a votary to the faith of Christ, and whose silvery locks, and wrinkled brow told more of sorrow, and persecution, of fortitude, and benevolence, than any earthly passion. He bent tenderly, over the dying Estelle.

“ ‘ There is yet time,’ she said eagerly ; ‘ draw me nearer to the fountain, for the stream of life is ebbing faster than the spring before us, and will never burst forth again but in eternity ; and thou, my father, assist this holy man—it is the last service thy Estelle will require.’

“ In speechless agony did the governor bear his precious burden to the fountain ; and there, with her head resting on his shoulder, did the beautiful Estelle receive the rites of baptism, and devote herself to the service of that Master, into whose presence she was prematurely summoned.

“‘Speak, Estelle! speak!’ cried the agonized parent. ‘Look up once more, my injured spotless child. Couldst thou but read the torture I endure, thou wert too well avenged.’

“‘Say not so, my father!’ she exclaimed, while her faltering voice bespoke how life, and death, were struggling for the possession, of that fair form. ‘But, oh! if you ever loved your Estelle; if she were indeed the star of your home, listen, I beseech you, to this holy man, whose precepts can disarm the grave of every horror, and teach a timid heart like mine to exult in such a death as this.’ And, ere her eyes were closed, and ere the light of reason was quenched, she beheld the stern warrior kneeling meekly at the hermit’s feet, sprinkled with the water that he had, alas! dyed, with his daughter’s blood.’

“‘Grieve not,’ she said, while her half glazed eye beamed with a transient, and almost celestial light. ‘Grieve not, my father, that the crown of early martyrdom be conferred by hands I love so well.’”

Blanch concluded her legend, and there was silence for a few moments; for it needed not that William’s thanks should be expressed by

words. The tale, however, and the ideas it brought with it, had given another turn to their thoughts, and tempered the gaiety in which they had before indulged. The conversation assumed a more serious character, and Blanch's heart expanded with thankfulness, when she found that on the all important subject of religion, her lover's opinions were founded on the same basis, and directed towards the same end as her own. William, was one for whom the specious sophistry of "the philosopher" had no charms, and whose earnest admiration, of all that was beautiful and fascinating in nature, only served to augment his veneration, for the source, from whence such blessings were derived.

It was a sweet calm pleasure which the lovers tasted then, sitting side by side in that lovely spot, and mingling the purest thoughts of their young and untainted hearts; but of course it could not last long, and William soon started up, as he caught the sound of voices. The next moment the riders ascended the hill; the marquise came first, looking somewhat dejected; while behind her, at some distance, lagged the prince. But Roland Stanley had

been more faithful, and he now appeared in earnest conversation with Madame D'Aubry at her bridle rein. Blanch advanced to greet them; but Madame de Beaulieu's salutation savoured of ill-humour, which was not a little increased by seeing the prince dismount, and offer his arm to the young Englishwoman. The poor marquise had indeed been severely mortified; for his highness had shown himself absent and uncommunicative, notwithstanding the assiduous court she paid him. The courage she displayed, had been entirely thrown away; and even when she adopted another style, and yielded suddenly to the natural timidity of her sex, the tone in which the prince offered consolation, was one of frigid ceremony. Dispirited by repeated failures, the marquise at length assumed "*un petit air boudeur*," that at least gave her ingenuity breathing-time, if it had no better effect.

The prince, in the mean while, was perplexed at the utter indifference with which Madame D'Aubry's beautiful niece seemed to regard him; not that she had made any deep impression upon his heart, but as his eye followed her graceful form, he could ill account for the ne-

glect, (it might almost be called) with which she treated *him*—the Prince de C——, the darling of the sex. He was too well acquainted with all the little airs of coquetry, to suspect for a moment that Blanch's indifference was assumed. The vanity of his highness was piqued, and his curiosity excited. He knew much of Blanch from report, and that she had refused the hands of several noble Bordelois; and as he called to mind her demeanour at the ball, and many little incidents connected with that evening, which had not then appeared remarkable, he collected the scattered facts in his mind, and before he again met the unconscious object of so much meditation, had dived deep into her secret, and was firmly resolved to sift the matter thoroughly.



CHAPTER VIII.

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It was the situation, rather than the ruin itself, that made the Chateau de Nerly an object of interest. Perched on an eminence, and standing several miles from any other building, unless we except the humble chapel of St. Estelle, it commanded an extensive view of the surrounding country, including the city of Bordeaux, whose handsome edifices, numerous spires, and fine line of bank, with the high ground on the opposite side of the river towards Carbon Blanc, formed a beautiful boundary to the prospect on that side. As the eye ran to the west again, the sun sparkled upon the Gironde, which appeared like a large golden serpent wandering through richly-cultivated lands towards the Bay of Biscay. The castle had at one time enjoyed the proud reputation

of being impregnable; but time, that most powerful of engineers (whose sapping is more certain than that of man, though not so speedy), had, after a slow and protracted siege, obliged the venerable fortress, to surrender at discretion.

The victor's ravages had indeed been terrible, for the greater part of the building was utterly destroyed, and of the stones that had once composed it, some had long taken their way down the hill, and chosen another and an humbler resting-place, while those that lay scattered around, were covered with moss and lichen. The long rank grass sprang up on the causeway, which the mailed foot of the brave had once trod so proudly; and, instead of the banner that spread its ample folds, emblazoned with the bearing of some potent noble, the wild ivy, and the tangled brier, thrown over the sides of the keep, waved backwards and forwards, as if asserting the conquest of Time. A bastion of considerable height formerly encircled the building, and even now formed an agreeable promenade, excepting where one part was separated from the other by a wide and deep breach, in the ramparts.

Madame D'Aubry's party entered the ruin

and proceeded straightforward, with the exception of William, whom the mistress of the place herself despatched on the opposite side, for the purpose of reconnoitring the ground, while she also walked a little in advance of the others, to make her own observations. Having selected a spot, which she thought would answer every purpose for their “*petit déjeuner*,” she sat down to await Williams’s arrival.

The four others loitered behind, to admire the beauty of the prospect from the entrance; at least, so it appeared, for every eye was turned in that direction, and every mind in another.

The prince was still wondering about Blanch; his admiration increasing with his suspicions. The marquise was bitterly repenting her cruelty to the poor Comte de —, who had solicited a seat in her carriage and had been refused; while Roland Stanley, who stood by her side, occasionally adapted a remark to a capacity, which he estimated rather meanly. But Blanch was the most impatient of the party; and feeling that every moment was precious to love, and consequently lost, if not given to William, she planned her escape for some time, and at last effected it.

“The view must be infinitely more striking from that little tower,” she exclaimed, as, quitting the prince’s arm hastily, she ascended the broken staircase, without observing its tottering condition, and without heeding Mr. Stanley, who called loudly to her to desist.

By this time William, who had gone round, would have been by Madame D’Aubry’s side, but a wide and yawning chasm, which had till then escaped his notice, put an effectual stop to his progress. He stood gazing at it for a moment before he retraced his steps, to return by the circuit of the walls, when he was attracted by the earnest tone of Stanley’s voice. It was with no pleasurable feelings that he then beheld Blanch, in what he believed with reason, a most precarious situation; but his eye was attracted at the same instant by the danger of another of the party. Blanch’s step, light as it was, had loosened some rubbish, in which several large masses of granite were embedded, and one of these was now rolling forward with frightful speed, exactly in the direction of Madame D’Aubry. There was no time for thought or calculation. At one bound William cleared the beach, and stood by Madame D’Aubry, while, pushing her aside with but

little ceremony, he encountered the stone with his foot, and forced it to take another direction. It fell over the ramparts, and was heard for a long time bounding, and dashing from side to side, till it reached the deep dell below. Several minutes elapsed before Madame D'Aubry became fully conscious of the risk she had run, or the obligation she was under to William, but then her agitation and her gratitude rendered her almost speechless. Nor was the sight of her niece at that moment, calculated to tranquillize her emotion, mounted on the summit of a crazy tower, whose stairs, once put in motion, were now likely to take revenge for the accommodation they had so often unwillingly afforded to others, and to walk down themselves, leaving Blanch to do so as best she might. William called to her to wait, until he could come to her assistance ; but in attempting to advance, he found that his leg had been hurt in the effort to turn the stone, and the acute pain arising from this accident, prevented him from walking a step.

Poor Blanch, half bewildered by all that had passed, and all the disasters she had caused, now begged Mr. Stanley in a meek tone to tell her how she should descend. That gentleman

walked carefully towards the tower, feeling his way (as he was wont to do on all occasions) with a large stick he held in his hand; and having directed Blanch in every step she took, shook hands warmly with her, and congratulated her on her own, and Madame D'Aubry's safety. She thanked him hastily, and ran towards her aunt, who was now seated on the parapet by the side of William, and expressed her regret in heartfelt terms.

"You were very silly, Blanch," replied that lady, in a tone more nearly resembling reproof, than was usual to her; "there could be no use nor pleasure, in exposing your life, even if it had had no other bad effects. See where the stone came, it has left a visible track; but, above all, look at that dreadful place across which Mr. Clifford ventured his life. Good heavens! I shudder to think how easily he might have fallen."

And Blanch shuddered too, and checked her breath, as she looked down into the deep pit, the bottom of which was not perceptible, amidst the weeds and briars that filled it. She did shudder, and the blood forsook her cheek, and the tears stood in her eyes,

as she turned and saw William vainly endeavouring to conceal the pain under which he was at that moment labouring. For pain is despotic, and the victim who refuses to acknowledge its empire by word, is sure to bear the confession on his countenance. Had she never known it before, Blanch would at that moment have discovered how deep, how fervent, how tender, was her affection for William Clifford, when she beheld him suffering, when the danger which had threatened his life still stared her in the face. She forgot her prudent resolutions; she forgot Madame D'Aubry's presence, and gave way to every feeling of agitation, in a way too likely to excite remark.

"God be praised!" she exclaimed, "that you are safe—both of you," she added hastily, recalled by the surprise which Madame D'Aubry evinced at the unusual warmth of her manner; "for oh! what would have become of me, if—"

The poor girl was greatly distressed, and turning to Madame D'Aubry, with the tears trembling on her long dark lashes, she exclaimed,

"My dear aunt, how I have alarmed you; and what pain Mr. Clifford is in!"

The kind-hearted woman, although not yet recovered either from her fright, or her astonishment, kissed Blanch's cheek, while William, holding out his hand, inquired if she believed him ungrateful, for such an opportunity of manifesting his devotion to Madame D'Aubry. The reply was most fortunate, leading the good lady's thoughts from Blanch's unguarded expression of feeling, to her obligation to Clifford, and to the necessity of taking some steps about the accident that had befallen him. The rest of the party coming up, congratulations and compliments were offered and accepted; but Madame D'Aubry called for Stanley's aid, in persuading William to allow of their immediate return to Bordeaux.

"No, no!" exclaimed Clifford gaily, endeavouring to conceal the severe pain which was however sensibly increasing; "that would be negative kindness, indeed, to pen me up in a sick room, where I should fancy myself in pain for want of better amusement, and become a prey to remorse, for having brought our agreeable party to an untimely end, and carried my good friends here back to Bordeaux before they intended. Besides," he continued, laughing, "I can see by Madame D'Aubry's countenance



that she considers immediate amputation as the slightest remedy which the surgeon will propose; and as I have a friendly feeling towards a limb that has done me good service, I humbly entreat that the evil hour of separation may be postponed for a few hours."

"It is very well for you to jest upon the subject, my dear Mr. Clifford," rejoined Madame D'Aubry, "but, at least, for my sake"—

"Well, then, at least for your sake, and that of Madame la Marquise, and Miss Courtenay, not to mention monseigneur, or your two starving countrymen, do allow those attendant satellites of yours to spread the cloth upon this propitious fragment of firmly-rooted granite, which fortune has evidently designed for our table; and let those promising paniers display their contents. Nay, Madame D'Aubry, a moment ago you spoke of gratitude, and had well-nigh persuaded me I had done something extraordinarily praiseworthy; and now you refuse me a bit of bread."

"I know one thing," she replied, in high goodhumour, "and so do you,—that I am a silly old woman, who can be talked into any

thing;" and she made a sign to the servants, who quickly spread their little repast. By degrees, the accident gave way before other topics, and Madame D'Aubry laid before the company her plans for the reconstruction of one or two of the principal towers of the chateau, the repairs of the large hall, with many other schemes, which appeared more interesting then, than they would now, were we to detail them.

"Only conceive, my dear marquise," she said, anxious to dispel the cloud on her friend's brow; "only conceive what a beautiful fête we might have here on a summer's evening!"

"I don't see how that is possible," replied the *élégante* drily. "No carriages could drag up here, and I don't suppose people would find any pleasure in riding a horrid mule *en grande toilette*, or in spoiling their chaussure by scrambling up on foot."

"Still," said Blanch, who did not approve of the way in which her aunt's proposition had been treated; "still we might have a sufficient number of apartments for the ladies; and as for those craven knights," she added, laughing, "who considered the ascent too rugged, or the fatigue too great, we were well rid of their presence."

William had not spoken for some time, the pain having become almost insupportable ; but he now exclaimed, forcing the gaiety he did not feel, "Most true, lovely Chatelaine, but I would improve upon your plan, and have the castle garrisoned by its fair inmates, and besieged by the brave knights of Bordeaux. Be it understood, however, that the garrison need not hold out too long, and that the victors and the vanquished should dance together in the great hall."

Delightful !" cried Blanch, "and the ram-parts should be illuminated, and the reconciled foes should walk here together, to recount their mutual achievements."

"With a handsome young troubadour to play his cithern beneath that wall, and shape his song so as to be heard by all, and understood by one," whispered the prince, who sat by Blanch's side.

She did not answer him, but continued to look around, as if she already beheld the scene in idea. The prince, however, was not to be discouraged, and observing that Stanley was endeavouring to engage William in a scientific controversy on fortification, while the two elder ladies were occupied with something quite as

interesting, in their way, he again addressed his fair neighbour :

“ If that little wood on the eastern side were illuminated, it would rival the *Bosquet de Diane*, and would at least be as well adapted for a *tête à tête*.

Blanch's fine eye flashed as his highness concluded, and turning towards him with a smile that had more of scorn than sweetness, she replied aloud, though not sufficiently high to attract the notice of their companions, “ When we commence our preparations, monseigneur, I shall do my best to enlist you in our cause ; you will gain intelligence of every one's proceedings, and report them accordingly. There are few who would accept, or rather, I should say, there are few qualified for the office of — ”

“ Finish the sentence, noble *Chatelaine*,” rejoined her antagonist ; “ or rather, let me do so for you, lest the word ‘ *Spy* ’ should sound too harsh from those beautiful lips : but I perceive that the prospect of warfare has kindled a martial ardour in your breast ;—beware, however, lest you slay your best friend by the point of your lance, or the edge of your wit.”

“ What would your definition of a best friend

be?" said Blanch, turning to William with a smile of playful meaning.

"I will tell you his answer," insisted the prince, in a still lower tone than before; "it will be—'Blanch Courtenay!'"

She turned from him offended, and inquired with undisguised interest, if William were still suffering. When the little banquet was completed and cleared away, and the others, under Madame D'Aubry's guidance, proceeded to inspect the hall, Blanch boldly solicited her aunt's permission to remain with Clifford until their return. The prince's laudable intention of confusing her, had had, in fact, a diametrically opposite effect. The fact of the secret being discovered appeared to bind her still closer to William, and at the same time to smooth the way towards an explanation with Madame D'Aubry. Neither could Blanch's pride brook the intrusive raillery of a stranger on the subject nearest her heart; and contrasting the conduct of Stanley with that of the prince, in her own mind, she drew a most decided conclusion in favour of the former, whose merits she began to perceive for the first time. The prince gazed on her fixedly twice, as she took her place by

the side of William, on the rampart-wall; but Blanch's fine dark eye was not to be quelled by that of so inferior an adversary.

When they were gone, William, who, to decision of purpose and character, joined a tenderness of manner that finds its way too easily to a woman's heart, now strove to sooth Blanch, as she again and again mourned over the accident, of which she had been the involuntary cause. He could have told her—ay, and he did tell her—that in a moment of such happiness, there was something grateful in the pain he endured.

“I have gained your aunt's heart, dearest Blanch,” he said, “by the trifling service I rendered her, and perhaps she will be more inclined to listen to our confession with clemency. And if it were a deadly wound,” he added, smiling, “that sweet voice, and that beseeching glance, were surer remedies than the kindness of woman ever yet applied to the hurts of knight or Paladin. But see, they are returning; and now I think of it, tell me, dear Blanch, what did the prince say, to call forth such a reproof from lip and eye?”—

“Nay,” interrupted his companion playfully,

“would you play the tyrant so soon, William. and inquire into the meaning of every word and look? or would you judge so meanly of my prowess as to think I required a champion in so slight a skirmish?”

In the mean while the person in question, not a little mortified by an engagement, in which he felt himself worsted, had taken advantage of the lovers' absence to throw in a few opportune hints to Madame D'Aubry, which, together with the observations she had made herself, startled her not a little. She jokingly mentioned the prince's insinuations to Mr. Stanley, but he was far too wary to commit himself. He had a part to play on this occasion, and he ridiculed the idea in such a manner, that the good lady felt ashamed of having even given way to suspicion—and then her heart was so full of gratitude to William, that she would not allow herself to believe any thing which, according to rule, ought to entail her displeasure.

They mounted their mules, for the evening was advancing, and William and Blanch were once more thrown together. They could not walk, as they had intended, on account of his lameness, but they rode side by side, and would

have quarrelled with the moments for flying so fast, if their happiness had left them in a frame of mind to quarrel with any thing.

The day had been splendid in its whole course, and was now drawing off its forces like a skilful general, before the rapid strides of night, while the well ordered retreat was closed by a glorious evening. Indeed, that vanquished power receded slowly, and lingered fondly in the west, as if regretting to lose the dominion of so fair a world. But Night was at length triumphant, and her standard of deep blue, starred with gold, was now displayed above the conquered earth, while she exercised her sway so mildly that no one could rebel, or even murmur beneath an influence so genial.

Those who have never met, except in the stifling atmosphere of the world; those whose vows have been plighted and replighted by the glare of torchlight alone, and whose every look and word has been subjected to the ordeal of that world's scrutiny, could hardly conceive the rapture of such an hour as this. There is surely a power in nature to cement our fondest ties, to strengthen the bond of union between two kindred spirits, and give a pure but keen zest, to the



sweet intercourse of the heart. Far, far more lovely becomes every memory that can be coupled with some fair page in nature's varied volume; far dearer to the well-constructed mind each remembrance that is bound up with the inestimable gifts of the Creator. Such associations render transitory moments permanent—immortal. While by the side of one we love, to let the eye wander over the green bosom of the earth, or the wide expanse of heaven; to mark together the exquisite colouring of the flowers, or the majestic proportions of the forest trees, has in it a spell to bind for ever recollection.

If such happiness could continue our lot through life; if man were ever to remain the noble and sincere, and woman the devoted and single-minded being, who often tread together the early path of a young and pure affection, before the one be turned aside, and taught to believe his sincerity contemptible, and the other tutored by the world, until her ill-repaid devotion be divided into a thousand parts, or lavished on some unworthy object; oh, if they could ever be, as William and Blanch now were, then would this world be the Paradise

that was forfeited, and man would forget to soar above the joys of earth !

He who in his weary walk of life arrives unexpectedly at some fair and secluded spot, would fain linger there awhile, to taste a repose whose pleasures must be enhanced by the scene before him ; and thus would we willingly pause and dwell upon this period in our narrative, before we rise to encounter all the difficulties and danger that may await our progress ; before we speak of separation, of doubt, and sorrow. Ah, well was it for those two young hearts, that this one day at least should be unclouded by the knowledge of what a few more would bring forth : happy and grateful were they, for that one whole day of perfect enjoyment ; and oh how often, in after times and distant scenes, did their truant fancy steal back to the Chateau de Nerly, and the little chapel of St. Estelle !

The sight of the buildings offended their eyes, and the busy, vulgar tones of the human voice jarred in their ears on entering Bordeaux.

Madame D'Aubry, who was much fatigued, drove home immediately, and alighted with her niece, but not until she had overpowered William with thanks and praises, and issued her

strictest injunctions to Stanley to escort her “preserver” home, and assist him in mounting the stairs. William smiled at her anxiety, and expressed a hope that no visions of falling stones or broken limbs would disturb Madame D’Aubry’s repose. To Blanch he said nothing, but ere she left her lover’s side, her hand was detained for one moment, and pressed ardently to his lips.

CHAPTER IX.

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WILLIAM'S dwelling was at some distance from the Hotel D'Aubry, and during the drive thither, Stanley did not lose a moment of the time, which he considered precious. He perceived plainly that his forbearing and unobtrusive conduct had not been lost upon his companion, and he now determined to follow up the favourable impression he had made. From the moment Stanley became acquainted with William Clifford, he had resolved on straining every point to draw him over to the interests of the Stuart party: for this zealous Jacobite was well aware, that while some might advance the cause by their power or possessions, there were others, from whose spirit of enterprise, and constancy of purpose, double advantage would

accrue. William had been for a short time in foreign service, and had only relinquished a military life, which was so well suited to his tastes, because he could not bear the idea of serving any country but his own, or of running the risk of one day turning his arms against England.

Stanley, who really admired the character of his young countryman, directed all his thoughts to William's political conversion, and, in possession of more information than the latter suspected, he thought how best he might turn that information to account. He accordingly seized the opportunity of insinuating that English affairs wore a favourable aspect, and that ere long, the time would come when titles and possessions which had been illegally suspended, would again be restored under a new government. He dwelt with subtlety on the satisfaction which every patriotic mind must experience on witnessing the final triumph of justice, and the unspeakable joy of a re-establishment in their native country.

William listened with surprise, not unmingled with regret, as he deduced from Mr. Stanley's reasoning that he was acquainted with

the circumstances of his uncle's disgrace; but he judged it better not to make any remark upon the subject, as the tone of Stanley's voice was neither individual nor emphatic. William suffered himself to listen with interest while his companion drew a picture of domestic life, which he affirmed belonged more especially to England. He painted in vivid colours the blessings of a home which should always be situated in the land of our ancestors, and then winding up his discourse with a burst of enthusiasm, declared his belief that the time was not far distant, when such happiness would be his own portion. "Then," he exclaimed, "the slightest service, the humblest loyalty, will be rewarded, and England will glory in a monarch who forgets to revenge, and only remembers to recompense!"

At this moment the coach stopped before William's door, and Stanley having fulfilled Madame D'Aubry's commands to the letter, took a friendly leave of Clifford, promising to visit him on the morrow, and strongly advising him not to expose himself to any fatigue.

But when the morrow came William mounted his horse, and proceeded towards the Fort du Hà,

in spite of these counsels, or the more important remonstrances of his hurt limb. As he rode along the streets, his reflections were of that nature which dressed every object in bright colours, and inclined his heart to a feeling of universal benevolence. The more engrossing thoughts of friendship and love had lately detained him from the society of De Brissac; but Clifford now determined to pay his respects to the general, immediately after the long anticipated interview with Dumont. He blamed himself, indeed, for having allowed so long a time to elapse without visiting the governor, whose kindness had been unremitting since their first accidental meeting, and who always welcomed his young friend with the same benevolent smile and warm greeting as ever, without remarking on the rareness of his visits. On arriving at the fortress he was positively refused admittance to Dumont; and on inquiring for the general, was told that he was indisposed.

But Clifford was not to be refused, and he insisted that De Brissac should at least be informed of his visit. He was soon ushered into the veteran's dressing-room, where he found him in the uncommon position of lounging in a large chair, and bearing evident marks

of suffering. De Brissac raised his head as the other entered, and shaking his hand warmly, bade him be seated; though not until he had remarked upon Clifford's lameness, and inquired the cause.

"I am not well, William," he began; "and this business of M. Dumont is not calculated to cheer me. I will not weary you with a long account of the regent's letter, which I received two days ago, or the fault he finds with my treatment of the prisoner; but you know how often with me inclination is compelled to yield to duty, and solitary confinement must be again enforced, I fear, for a longer time. Do not look so reproachfully at me, my dear boy; you have no idea of the sorrow which an accumulation of circumstances has lately brought upon me. I am convinced that the state of my mind is prejudicial to my health. Your old friend, William, has not much longer to live, in a world where he is already forgotten."

Clifford was affected by the sad strain of the old man's conversation, and addressed him in a tone of affectionate respect, which was not lost upon De Brissac.

"I will not tell you, nor indeed could I," continued the latter, "all that has passed be-



tween the regent and myself on the subject of M. Dumont; but one thing I am determined upon, that while he is under my care, I will protect as well as guard him, and I can only hope, for his sake, that, during the remnant of my life, he may continue in Bordeaux."

"I trust so, indeed," replied William, alarmed by the ambiguous manner in which he spoke; "but why should you talk so despondingly of your own health?"

"Because," rejoined De Brissac, "I am impressed with the idea that my end is approaching."—He paused, and then added, even more sadly than before, "I have no relation in the world, no natural tie; but believe me, William, I love you as a son, and my prayer, at this moment, is, that you may close my eyes; would to God I could believe it possible!"

"Do not," answered his companion, "add to my sorrow by such melancholy forebodings. I trust you may live many years to watch over the safety of Bordeaux, to advocate the cause of the unfortunate, and benefit me by your friendship and counsels."

The old man shook his head, and then taking advantage of the subject, he exhorted William

never to involve himself in the intrigues of party ; and, at the same time, hinted his belief that some of the Chevalier de St. George's agents were in the town. After conversing for some time longer, Clifford bade him adieu, promising to return soon, while the general, on his part, volunteered to send the first intelligence of any counter orders respecting Dumont, although the tone in which he spoke showed plainly how little hope he entertained.

Clifford left the fortress more sadly than he entered it ; and as he traversed the garden, the chimes of the clock fell on his ear like the knell of those happy hours, which he had passed with Dumont. He fancied there was an unusual tone of mystery in the governor's language, that spoke ill for the prisoner, and as William rode slowly forward, his imagination, which was sufficiently under the subjection of his heart to be roused by the slightest danger that threatened those he loved, now conjured up many a scene of horror. He beheld in idea a subterranean dungeon into which Dumont had been thrown ; his limbs laden with chains, and his lofty spirit at length bowed beneath the accumulation of mental and bodily suffering—

or worse—the noble form of the prisoner extended on the rack, enduring the same ignominious and torturing examinations that were then inflicted upon a common malefactor.

William could not support the picture his own fancy had painted, and he turned from it to the memory of Blanch. His grief for Dumont found some compensation in the knowledge of her affection; and her lovely image, as it stood before him glowing with beauty and happiness, formed a soothing contrast to his fearful thoughts. Yes! her love was the Iris of which he had sung; and though the sky still retained its threatening aspect, and clouds of doubt and sorrow were suspended above his head, that arch of hope still gleamed before him, and, viewed in every different direction, presented some new and brilliant colouring, while it held out a future promise of serenity and joy!

He proceeded to the Hotel D'Aubry, but disappointment dogged his steps, and met him at every corner. Madame D'Aubry had ordered that no one should be admitted.

William was now suffering from violent throbbing in the limb, which was not likely to be improved by its pendent position, and he

therefore retraced his steps to his solitary home. On the table he found a long epistle from Madame D'Aubry, entreating him not to leave the house, and recommending a skilful leech, who was the bearer of the letter.

William felt more inclined to docility than he had done in the morning, and seeing that there was no help for it, he allowed the surgeon to prescribe a course of remedies, of which he considered confinement as the severest.

The man of medicine brought daily inquiries from the Hotel D'Aubry, to which, however, was annexed a positive refusal to admit the invalid within that house, until he received due permission to stir from home. Upwards of a week, therefore, elapsed, and neither the days nor the hours appeared diminished by the impatience of William's mind. Stanley visited him frequently, and from him he learned that the governor remained indisposed; of Blanch he heard nothing, excepting that her name was always coupled with her aunt's in the tender inquiries with which the surgeon was intrusted. Clifford longed to know whether she had come to an explanation with Madame D'Aubry, and having at length extorted a permission to leave

the house, he once more mounted his horse, and galloped through the streets, without drawing a rein till he arrived in the Chapeau Rouge; but he did so just as Madame D'Aubry's coach turned the opposite corner and disappeared. Greatly dispirited, he however drew up before the door, to inquire when the carriage was likely to return, and was informed by the servant that Miss Courtenay had given orders for his admittance if he called.

CHAPTER X.

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WILLIAM walked eagerly up the stairs, and pushing open the door, he entered gently. Blanch was sitting in the recess of the window, with her back towards the door; and if surprised at finding her alone, he was alarmed by the dejection of her attitude.

He approached, however, with all the warmth that their engagement warranted; but was shocked to see her turn from him the moment their eyes met, and hide her face between her hands. At that instant, Dumont's warning seemed to vibrate in Clifford's ears; but it was only for an instant, and the next he advanced two or three steps, exclaiming,

"What has happened, Blanch, that this meeting should be so different from our last?"

"Oh!" replied the other, in a voice choked

by emotion, but without raising her head, “how shall I have the courage to tell you all—to tell you that we must part?”

“Part!” echoed William, in an impatient tone, while he bent a look of stern reproach on the fair creature before him; “is this the moment, that I have looked to so ardently, the thought of which has cheered those long, long days of separation,—and can you be so cold and so unmoved, Blanch, when you torture me by such a declaration?”

She turned her beautiful face towards him, now disfigured and swollen by weeping, with an expression of mild reproof.

“You did not mean to wound me, William,” she said, after a pause; “and when you have heard, I trust you will cease to blame me. I should never have taken this step, I should never have exposed myself to a possibility of your censure, by receiving you in a clandestine manner, had I not had something of importance to communicate. Read this letter; it is a summons from my father; and when you have done so, let me know if you coincide with my opinion that it is incumbent on me to return to England. Whether to remain there or not, or

whether to precede you only by a short time, will depend entirely on yourself; for, indeed, I love to think that every future thought and action of my life will be influenced by you."

Clifford gazed on the letter with more attention than composure; and the frown that had gathered on his brow when he first entered the room, gave way to an expression of doubt and grief. He read the paper twice without speaking, and when he had done so, he placed it on the table, exclaiming, "I was not prepared for this; at least, not so soon! Blanch," he continued, taking her hand, and looking into her face, with a sadness that did not bid fair to cheer her spirits, as the whole fabric of happiness seemed tottering beneath his feet; "dear Blanch, on that blessed night when your own lips assured me of happiness, I told you then that it was a crime in me to love you. Mystery and misfortune are linked with my destiny, and I should never have asked you to share them with me. But what will you say, or rather what will you think of me now, when I tell you that there are reasons, powerful, invincible reasons, against our immediate union; and,



above all, that those reasons must remain secret, even to you, with whom I would fondly share the inmost thoughts of my soul."

He appeared greatly distressed, and the warm blood that flowed into Blanche's pallid cheek showed how far she participated in his feelings.

"How ill," he continued, "do I seem to repay your confidence, and what room do I not afford for suspicion! But oh! Blanch, let me find a merciful judge in you; and so far believe that this mystery which may appear unwarrantable, will in itself tend to the accomplishment of our mutual wishes. Go to England; but let me entreat you not to mention our engagement to your parents, until I arrive to claim you, or until they propose another marriage. I know such concealment will be irksome to your nature, and am but too well aware that your position will be one of embarrassment; but if I can judge you from myself, Blanch, a sacrifice made for me, will not be wholly displeasing."

"You are the only person, William," she replied, "who ever read my heart so deeply. Had you asked me to do what was easy and

agreeable to my selfish inclinations I could not have promised obedience with so much confidence. But, good heavens," she continued, "we talk of it calmly now; and when we are miles and miles apart, when I cannot even hear your name mentioned, or converse with those who know you; when scenes which are not hallowed by your memory rise before me, and strangers talk indifferently of those in which I knew and loved you! Oh, William, who will ease my bursting heart; who will console me when I think of the trials you may endure, or the inducements you may have to forget your poor Blanch!"

She leaned her head upon his shoulder and wept.

"And you," he exclaimed, as he stooped down and kissed the glossy ringlet that lay upon his bosom; "you, in the centre of a brilliant court, loved, flattered, and admired, with every attraction of wealth and splendour to wean your thoughts from me, how dare I hope that you will withstand all these allurements for my sake alone?"

"How?" replied Blanch, as if wounded by the doubt; "by reading the heart that is all

your own ; by the assurance that I loved you even before that blessed moment which assured me of your affection."

Clifford pressed her hand, and continued : " Still that letter contains a hundred causes for uneasiness ; it gives me an insight into your father's character ; and if his commands should point to an immediate union with another ; if threats and menaces are used to intimidate you ? "

" William ! " she exclaimed, raising her head hastily, " are you one of those who suppose a woman incapable of resolution, even where her dearest feelings are concerned ? Believe me," she added, proudly, " there does not exist the power on earth that could compel me to one act which my own sense of truth and honour would condemn."

William gazed on her in silent admiration ; then, taking a small ring from his bosom,

" Give me your hand, Blanch ! " he exclaimed, " nay, it is mine already, and I wish merely to secure it mine for ever, by a fetter that will only be acknowledged by you."

She held out her trembling hand, and, as William placed the ring upon her finger, a

thousand bright associations connected with the act passed before their minds, and lent it a deep and thrilling interest. William held the small white hand in his, and bade her read the device, which was one they both loved. “*Qui bien aime, tard oublie.*” Blanch looked around for a moment, and then, taking a massive gold chain from her own neck, she threw it over his.

“There!” she said, smiling, though the tears stood in her eyes, while her voice assumed a tone where deep feeling was mingled with a degree of playfulness, under which she endeavoured to conceal her emotion. “There! your fetters, at least, shall be more powerful, more evident; but beware how you trifle with this magic chain, for should the heart that beats beneath it, wander for one single instant, from its allegiance, the golden links will snap asunder and divide into a thousand parts, never to be joined again by the hand of mortal workman.”

A pause ensued,—a pause

“When every glance implied a word,  
That by the heart's own ear was heard.”

But after a moment Blanch exclaimed, “Madame D'Aubry is returned! I hear her voice

in the corridor. Nay, William, you must not leave me now; the moment is arrived when, with her at least, concealment is unnecessary, and would be ungenerous."

Ere he could answer, Madame D'Aubry entered the room. She appeared thunderstruck at seeing him, and murmured a few, and almost indistinct words, about the impropriety of her niece's receiving visits during her absence. Blanch approached her gently, and spoke to her for several moments, in so low a tone as not to reach William's ear; but he could perceive the effect of the intelligence she communicated by the consternation depicted in Madame D'Aubry's countenance, while tears and sobs soon bore visible and audible evidence of her despair. The poor woman was placed in a most distressing situation; in one where she was called upon to act, before she had time to reflect on what course she would pursue. The regard she entertained for William, indeed, forbade her to manifest her displeasure towards him in open terms; and she therefore contented herself with sundry reproving glances in his direction, while on Blanch fell the weight of her uttered reproaches. It would be a work of time to ana-

lyze every component ingredient of Madame D'Aubry's vexation — fear of her brother's anger, disappointment at the failure of every brilliant prospect she had conjured up for Blanch, mortification at the triumph such an event would occasion among her rivals, and, lastly, vexation at not having discovered the secret of their attachment before. Madame D'Aubry dreaded few imputations more than a want of penetration in *les affaires de cœur*, as she feared it might argue a lack of admiration in the early part of her life; and she never forgot (although it was her nature to forgive) her brother's insinuation, that she had accepted M. D'Aubry because no one else had given her the opportunity. Added to this was the unexpected manner in which the business was announced. Madame D'Aubry's presence of mind could not compass any thing so sudden; and then, to increase her perplexity, came the recollection that William, her handsome favourite, William, had been suffering a whole week from the effects of his exertion in her own behalf; so that towards him, at least, she was tonguetied.

To feel conscious that you have an indisputable right to be angry, and yet writhe beneath

the necessity of curbing the expression, must be a severe trial to any man, but still more so to a woman; and it was long before Blanch (on whom, in consequence, fell the double share of indignation), by dint of argument, persuasion, and caresses, could in any degree pacify her aunt. The only comfort the good lady found was in hearing that the period for the marriage was undecided, and that the lovers were immediately to separate. She trusted a great deal to time and absence, and was consoled that her formidable brother was to be kept in ignorance for the present.

All this time William kept aloof, in no agreeable state of mind, entwining his hand so frequently with the chain which Blanch had given him, as to make it more than probable that the threatened division of links would speedily ensue; or, occasionally playing with his sword-knot, or destroying the beautiful bouquet that he had just presented to her he loved. At last she approached, and said, she believed it would be better to leave her and Madame D'Aubry together; informing him at the same time that her departure was fixed for the morning after the next, and that she had prevailed on her

aunt to allow him to pass the intervening day at the Hotel D'Aubry.

Clifford saluted the hostess as he left the room, and she returned his greeting by a silent inclination of the head ; although, as she watched him across the room, with a step that was still uneven, it required all her self-command not to call him back.

The morrow came, and Madame D'Aubry, who continued to steer the middle course, which appeared the safest to her conscience, in all respects, received William with the same tacit ceremony. The betrothed sat apart, and talked of every interest that they had in common. There was only one subject, however, which could for a moment withdraw their thoughts from their coming separation ; while Blanch learning with regret the anxiety that William suffered on account of Dumont, strove to speak cheerfully on the subject, and if her arguments failed in inspiring hope, at least her sweet voice had consolation in its tone.

Towards evening, they sought the balcony, and inhaled together, for the last time, the perfume of the flowers that were no longer to thrive beneath her care. There are times when the mind



is involuntarily impressed with the evanescence of all that pertains to earth, when the hours seem to glide away with supernatural speed, and the palpable present to fade even while we gaze upon it. Thus it was with Blanch ; though she stood beside William, with her hand closely locked in his, she already believed him gone. She turned her eyes upon the well-known buildings, the large towers of St. André, on her own little bower of plants, but every object wore a strange aspect. It was from that spot, that, in a moment of unguarded affection, she had thrown the white rose, which William still preserved ; it was there she had listened to his song, and it was there that they once more watched the magnificent sunset, which closed a day of cloudless serenity. They looked towards the sky, and then upon each other ; there was pleasure in the thought, that the same ray fell upon both. They watched the day decline, and the night set in, and the young moon rise slowly in the east, and hang its little crescent over the town, and then Blanch turned to her lover and bade him sing the “ Exile’s Home.”

“ Let me hear it once more, William,” she

said, "now that my heart can so well respond to every note."

She fixed her eyes upon the heavens, and drank in every sound as William began the song. His voice was low and mellow, but feeling lent it so exquisite a pathos and so harmonious a modulation, as even struck his own perception. Every word appeared to float from his lips the effect of spontaneous thought, and had Blanch withdrawn her steady gaze from the sky, she would have confessed that his countenance was more animated and beaming than she had ever yet beheld it. He finished—she did not thank him, for it would have been mockery to offer words in return for the intensity of pleasure he had afforded.

Here the little timepiece which stood in the room, followed by the chimes of every clock in Bordeaux, startled Blanch, by the late hour it announced, and, addressing William, in a low tone, she led him towards Madame D'Aubry, who was weeping silently in one corner of the apartment.

"Speak to him, dear aunt," she said, kneeling by her side, while taking her hand affectionately she placed it in that of Clifford. "Can any

one who is so dear to your poor Blanch, be indifferent to you?"

"No," faltered Madame D'Aubry, returning the friendly pressure of his hand, "but, oh Blanch, what will your parents say?"

"They will learn to bless him, as you do," she replied; "will you not bless us both?"

The poor woman's tears fell faster, and it was some moments before her voice was sufficiently audible.

"God bless you!" she said at last, "if you will have it so. God in his infinite mercy look down on you both, and bless you both, my children, and comfort me when you are gone, my dear, dear Blanch."

As she spoke with more seriousness and dignity than usual, William kneeled by the side of Blanch and echoed the prayer; and then they rose, and throwing his arm round the waist of his betrothed, he pressed her fondly to his heart.

"Farewell, Blanch," he said, "my own sweet Blanch; let neither indirect nor daring insinuations wean your heart from me; think of me as you do now, till you know me dead, or see me changed. Farewell, my love, my wife!"

“Not yet,” murmured Blanch; “in another moment I shall be calmer—one moment longer, for the love of heaven.”

William felt her heart beat violently against his own, and his firmness almost forsook him; he extricated himself with gentle violence from her clinging arms, imprinted one more kiss on her cold forehead, wrung Madame D'Aubry's hand, and was gone.

CHAPTER XI.

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ON the morning following the events we have just related, Blanch took an affectionate leave of Madame D'Aubry, and entered the ponderous vehicle that was to convey her to the coast. Her fellow-travellers consisted of the respectable female attendant whom her aunt had lately procured, and that lady's own confidential servant. Books, letters of recommendation, and every sort of precaution against danger and *ennui* had also been provided ; but Blanch was too much absorbed by her own reflections, too much astonished at the novelty of her situation, to take these trifles into consideration. She had kept her departure as secret as possible ; yet, as the coach rolled heavily through the streets, many of the lower classes, who had profited by her liberality, greeted her as she passed, and occasionally a cavalier of

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higher rank brought his face to a level with the window, and bade her prosper on the journey.

There were not many, indeed, whose taste led them to be abroad at so early an hour ; but there were enough to increase her melancholy. It is difficult to look upon features that have long been familiar to us, sensible that it is for the last time, without emotion ; and Blanch returned the greetings with a heightened colour, and a glistening eye. Even those whose society had once appeared irksome, or whose attentions were totally indifferent to her, she now remembered with gratitude, bordering on regret, in her softened mood of sadness.

She had entreated William to spare her the struggle of another parting ; but, as the carriage stopped under the last gateway, some flowers were thrust in at the window, and a well-known hand pressed the one that was extended to receive them with eagerness. As she drove under the vaulted archway, there appeared something ominous to Blanch's excited fancy in the hollow echo produced by the carriage ;—there was a farewell in every casual sound, a look of parting in every countenance that passed ; but those flowers, and that touch wakened deeper emo-

tions. She waved her hand ; she looked from the window, and caught a glimpse of his form ; and then, unwilling that her companions should observe the tears she could no longer restrain, Blanch concealed herself behind the large silk curtains, and gave way to reflection. The town in which she had passed so many happy hours was nothing to her now it was true : she had no ostensible tie ; no claim superior to that of the passing traveller who had sojourned there for any time. Yet, as Blanch quitted a place endeared to her by so many recollections, she felt that it would be impossible ever to consider any other as her home. To the climate of Bordeaux she owed the entire re-establishment of her health ; for when first placed under Madame D'Aubry's care, her life was despaired of. It was there, too, she had experienced the gradual development of the mind, (that period of unparalleled interest in the history of our own life,) when every passing day discovers the possession of some intellectual quality which had never been roused into action during the early years of childhood. She was journeying, it is true, to her native country, to the home of her parents ; but that country was unfamiliar, and those pa-

rents strangers. Poor Blanch ! the resolution which characterized her nature shrank before the consciousness of her lonely situation.

Indeed, it required a more picturesque and interesting country, than that through which she travelled, to rouse her from a growing insensibility to all external objects ; and it would require a pen more deeply imbued with the tincture of imagination, to render such a journey either agreeable or tolerable even in the society of Blanch Courtenay. We will therefore emulate the silent mood in which she travelled, and, embarking at the same time with the reader, find ourselves in their joint company on the shores of England.

It was with a feeling akin to pleasure, that Blanch first set foot on the strand, although repose was the only object of her desire. Her heart swelled with no pulse of patriotism ; her mind expanded with no thought of triumph, though she had once believed the sight of her native island would inspire such feelings. She only remembered that the sea had raised his barrier between them ; that they no longer “trod a common land.”

Amongst those who landed at the same time



with herself, there were many whose relatives or friends welcomed them on the beach ; and as Blanch watched the various meetings, a sense of utter desolation crept over her mind.

At the inn, however, she was received with every demonstration of respect, while a servant in the royal livery awaited her with a letter from Sir Philip. It was couched in kind (but, as Blanch fancied, rather ceremonious) terms, to bid his daughter welcome, and to recommend the bearer to her notice. "He is a trustworthy man," so ran the letter, "who has lived several years in my family, and has received orders to escort you in my coach to the palace, where Lady Courtenay and myself will expect you the second day from your disembarkation."

Taking leave of Madame D'Aubry's servant, by whom she despatched a small packet to Bordeaux, Blanch entered her father's carriage, passed the night at an inn on the road which had been specified in the letter, and the next morning proceeded on her journey. During the conclusion of the second day, she dwelt with vague apprehension on the meeting with

her parents, and fell into a long train of thought, from which she was at length aroused by the servant's announcing that they were entering the precincts of the palace.

Twilight had almost faded into darkness ; but as Blanch looked from the window, she admired the outline of the building, whose irregularity heightened its otherwise picturesque appearance.

There were already several glimmering lights in many of the windows, and as they drove up to the principal entrance, the sentinel's challenge was heard ; but the gates were thrown open on the appearance of Sir Philip's servant, and entering a large quadrangle, the coach passed through two archways, and drew up before a third. Blanch heard a man's voice, pitched in a tone of authority, and in a few moments several servants appeared by the side of the carriage, holding flambeaux. Half dazzled by the sudden glare, she allowed the steps to be lowered in silence, and then, springing to the ground, found herself in her father's arms.

"It is an hour later than you were expected," he said ; "and Lady Courtenay has almost

given up every hope of seeing you till to-morrow. But we must not remain here, for these old courts are damp and chilly of a night."

He took his daughter's arm, while at a sign from him two or three servants led the way up a spacious staircase, the foot of which was guarded by a sentinel, who presented arms. They then entered a large chamber, where several yeomen of the guard were lounging round a blazing fire, but on the appearance of Sir Philip they assumed a more respectful demeanour. Blanch, still hanging on his arm, had not dared to lift her eyes, although she longed to look upon her father; and perhaps it was a similar feeling that withheld his gaze. They traversed a gallery that communicated with several well-lit and well-furnished apartments, lined with servants in splendid liveries, and then entered a large room, where Blanch perceived a lady sitting by the fire.

Sir Philip approached: "Lady Courtenay!" he exclaimed, "your daughter is arrived."

The lady rose hastily, and as Blanch advanced eagerly to meet her embrace, she tasted for the first time, the sweet influence of maternal love. "Oh, Philip!" exclaimed his wife, in a

tone of great emotion, "look at our Blanch ; how beautiful she is ! "

" I cannot deny it," replied Sir Philip, taking his daughter's hand, and gazing on her with unfeigned admiration. " I did not believe my sister's description had so fair an original. But you must learn to bear a compliment with more composure," he added, smiling : " that cheek will never be cool, if a word from your parents can call up so warm a blush."

Blanch kissed Sir Philip's hand, and then turned to her mother, who wept for joy.

" How like her poor sister she looks, Philip!" she exclaimed at intervals, for her voice was almost choked by sobs.

But her husband did not answer : he appeared distressed, and almost ashamed of the agitation she displayed ; while the rebuke he conveyed in a single glance, succeeded in ultimately checking her tears, and they then adjourned to the next room, where supper had been served in the mean while.

Blanch had been accustomed, in Madame D'Aubry's house, to every comfort and luxury which affluence could command ; yet the number of servants, the profusion of dishes, and

the display of plate that now presented themselves, appeared to her as bordering on ostentation. She strove to silence a reflection so disparaging to the motives of her parents, and concluded that it was the usual style of living in England, or, perhaps, a mark of welcome on her return.

The conversation occasionally turned upon Bordeaux; and Sir Philip made some careless inquiries relating to his sister, and the society in which she lived; but the court was the general topic, and the possibility or probability of the king's speedy return to Hampton Court, was discussed in a manner that was but little interesting to Blanch.

Sir Philip endeavoured to discover the effect his brilliant descriptions of a life at court produced on his daughter's mind, and was surprised at the apathy with which she listened to such important matters. Lady Courtenay conversed but little; scarcely withdrawing her eyes from her newly-gained child, whose every look and movement, were watched with an earnestness that somewhat distressed its object. Fortunately, however, both parents agreed in supposing Blanch might be fatigued, and they

proposed that she should retire early to rest, in which she readily acquiesced.

Lady Courtenay led her daughter into the apartment which had been prepared for her, overpowering her with affectionate caresses; and yet, as the door closed behind her mother, Blanch doubted if her reception had been a satisfactory one. In Lady Courtenay's still handsome face she beheld such a rapid transition of expression, that she doubted if any one of the feelings that gave rise to such transient demonstrations could be either deep or lasting. And yet, on the whole, her mother had made the more favourable impression, for in her father's deportment there was far too much ceremony and punctilio; nor could she hide from herself that in their first mutual embrace, there had been something constrained, and almost cold, in his manner. Wearied in body and excited in mind, Blanch sank upon her knees, and committed herself and him she loved, to the protection of an almighty power; and then, with her heart full of William, she fell asleep, and passed the first night (after an absence of many years) under her paternal roof.

Leaving her to the enjoyment of those calm

slumbers which are often accorded to the innocent mind, even when a prey to doubt and sorrow, we will return to the society of her parents, and investigate their separate and opposite dispositions. Sir Philip Courtenay had been accustomed, from his earliest childhood, to look upon himself as entitled to the first place in his own consideration, and that of every one else. Self was the mainspring of every project, the secret cause of every word, look, and action; and even, in a world where selfishness must ever predominate, Sir Philip's attachment to his own individuality was carried to an unusual excess.

There are few persons, however egotistically inclined, who will not occasionally sacrifice their wishes to the gratification or benefit of another: but not so Courtenay; where he bestowed a gift it was with the hope of remuneration; where he extended patronage it was with the prospect of gain. The court had for many years been the secret object of his ambition; and, to procure an office in the household, he laid an extensive county interest at the feet of the ministry, and abandoned, without a sigh, the fine old ancestral domain in

which his childhood and youth had been passed. Installed in the palace of Hampton Court, where the king occasionally resided, Sir Philip was not yet satisfied; he must stand higher in the favour of royalty; he must be quoted as a constant companion of majesty, and receive public demonstrations of condescension. How much further his ambition extended, would be difficult, and might be presumptuous to surmise; but we will do him the justice to say, that no unforeseen circumstance ever threw him off his guard; every opinion he supported, and every step he took, were all calculated upon, and each tended to the same end. His very associates were chosen with prudence; and the similarity of taste which his majesty and Sir Philip displayed in friendship, was not a little remarkable. Another striking feature in the baronet's character was the thorough contempt with which he regarded the fair sex. Grace, beauty, and lively conversation were all he expected, all he wished for in women; to bear their folly and to tolerate their weakness, all that he considered due to them, and not so much as his generosity could always accord. The mental inferiority both of his wife and sister confirmed the general



opinion he had formed, and this consideration had induced him to defer the recal of his daughter, in the hope that her marriage abroad would rid him of an additional encumbrance. But it had chanced that some one who had visited Bordeaux, returned with so lively a description of Blanch's extraordinary beauty, as completely changed Sir Philip's system of domestic policy. With so lovely a being by his side would he not become of double importance? and might she not, by forming an advantageous alliance, prove a stepping-stone to every scheme of ambition. Sir Philip's determination was soon taken; and shortly after, he announced to his wife that he had complied with her repeated solicitations for the return of Blanch, and had already written to Bordeaux on the subject. Lady Courtenay was overpowered with joy, surprise, and gratitude; her wishes had indeed been frequent, but she knew her husband's nature too well to weary him by prayers. He had always been her idol, and it was supposed that the difficulty she found in concealing her predilection had determined the baronet on consoling the lady with his hand and himself with her fortune. Implicit, unqualified obedience, was the tribute

which he exacted, and in the payment of which she never paused. Easily excited by joy or grief, and as easily pacified, Lady Courtenay was nevertheless happy. The repulsive look that checked the slightest demonstration of her "sensibility" (even when called forth by affection for himself), the slighting answer to her opinions on any subject which Sir Philip deemed above the capacity of woman, occasioned a feeling of mortification that was but momentary. Lady Courtenay, with her *tender* heart, passed unscathed through a thousand nameless trials, which might have overpowered many a stronger mind. Thus the blow may rebound from the hollow surface, but fall with fatal violence on that body whose solidity offers resistance to its force. The submissive wife did not even blame her lord in thought. "It was his way ; he was so superior to herself and every one else, that he could not bring down his superior notions to a level with those of the world in general."

Had any one inquired if Sir Philip's general deportment were kind, she would have answered in the affirmative, without the slightest hesitation. She delighted in the opportunity

of asserting that they had never had one word of altercation since their marriage; which, thanks to her silent forbearance and prompt obedience, was strictly true. Cold and unconfiding, but courteous in the extreme, Courtenay, when in public, treated his wife with a respect that he hoped his example might ensure from others. The day that she stood beside him at the altar, Lady Courtenay believed herself the most enviable of beings, and the day of her presentation at court, when his majesty inquired of Sir Philip if that lady were his wife, her heart beat with corresponding feelings of pride and affection, although so many years had elapsed since their union.

CHAPTER XII.

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THE inevitable grief attending the separation of two devotedly attached beings was (in the case of William and Blanch) greatly aggravated by the unusual and uncertain circumstances in which they were both placed. On William's side regret was mingled with the dread of exciting a warrantable suspicion, both on the subject of his family and his future prospects. He feared lest his mysterious silence should appear doubly reprehensible to Blanch's calmer judgment ; and, above all, lest, in a moment of perplexity, she should seek refuge in the disclosure of her secret to some disinterested friend.

“ How,” he asked himself, “ could the most indulgent of mortals approve the conduct of that man who had suffered his betrothed bride

to depart without the slightest intimation of his future plans, or of the time and manner in which he would claim her hand ? ”

Yet the promise, which his uncle had exacted, was sacred in Clifford's eyes, and had never been violated by him ; the only two persons with whom he had ever conversed on the subject, were, De Brissac and the prisoner. The former, as we have already seen, was personally acquainted with the Chevalier Clifford ; and the latter, in course of conversation, had inquired with much apparent interest, if William were related to two brothers, who some years ago had frequented the court of Versailles, one of whom had married a French lady, and returned to England, but the other, who was the elder, had since been exiled in consequence of his attachment to the unfortunate Stuarts. Finding that his uncle's previous history was as well known to Dumont as to himself, William occasionally discussed the matter with his friend, without any breach of confidence. The moment was, he thought, now arrived, when it was incumbent upon him to take some steps with regard to his future prospects. He therefore commenced an epistle, in which, after a variety

of indifferent intelligence, he informed the "whilome" earl, that his nephew entertained serious intentions of marriage, which circumstance naturally increased his anxiety for the recovery of the fortune and estates. He proceeded to express his sorrow that, according to his uncle's present determination, the only prospect of succession was coupled with an event which he prayed God to avert. He then made use of every argument that he judged likely to remove the chevalier's scruples, and induce him to take the only means for regaining the possessions for himself, with the succession for his nephew. He composed four or five despatches in this strain before he achieved one that perfectly satisfied him, on all points, and then, having read that over with profound attention, he committed it to the flames!

There was something grating to the delicacy of William's mind, in even alluding to the circumstance; and he felt that he was wronging both his uncle and himself, by asking the former to make the only sacrifice he had ever refused, and by appearing (himself) for the first time, as a suppliant.

As he watched his own letter consume, Wil-

liam perhaps appreciated the chevalier's repugnance to solicit a favour better than he had ever done before.

Melancholy and dispirited he left the house, and wandering through the streets, found himself at the door of the Hotel D'Aubry.

He followed the servant mechanically to that room which teemed with the recollection of Blanch, and felt grateful that he was left there alone for a few moments, while his arrival was made known to Madame D'Aubry. He stood as if entranced, casting his eye wistfully around him, with the same feeling as that experienced by the Indian priest, who stood before the vacant altar of his temple, when desecrated by the removal of its patron deity. A thousand objects connected with her he loved addressed themselves to his inmost heart. Her little table stood in the recess, and on it were scattered a few things that had once belonged to her; at the open window her plants were still thriving, and an exquisitely-finished portrait of herself now hung on that side of the room she usually occupied. The picture was Blanch's parting gift to her aunt, and was remarkable for the subdued tone of its colouring, as well as for its

striking resemblance to the original. She was painted in the dress of Diana, and was leaning on the well-known altar ; and William felt convinced that the arrangement of the picture had been influenced by a desire to perpetuate the memory of that evening, on which they had plighted their vows.

How long did he stand and gaze upon those speaking features ; upon that peculiar smile, which appeared to waver between joy and sorrow, awaiting a look or a word from one it loved, to decide the undetermined expression.

He stood before the picture until he almost wondered the ardour of his gaze did not warm it into life, and then he turned away, and cast himself upon a chair ; but his eyes were again attracted and spell-bound there.

The interview with Madame D'Aubry was not calculated either to cheer or console William. On entering the apartment she gave way to a burst of tears, and forgetting that Clifford had as strong a claim to compassion as herself, she detailed at length the irreparable loss she had sustained in Blanch, while with little judgment she dwelt upon the wilful, and somewhat tyrannical disposition of Sir Philip Courtenay, and



foretold that much sorrow would result from the influence of such a character over his daughter's destiny.

There was an indecision about Madame D'Aubry with which William found it difficult to cope: at one moment she lifted her eyes to the picture, and broke forth into a passionate appeal to his feelings, addressing him as the future husband of Blanch; then, after a short pause, her whole manner would change, and her language savour of reproach, as if he had added to the sorrow of parting. Yet, as William rose to depart, she called him her dear son, and bade him welcome to the house, that could no longer offer any attraction either for him or any one else, now that its brightest ornament was gone.

William closed this day of gloom with a visit to De Brissac, whose health and spirits were gradually, but visibly declining. Before Clifford retired to rest, however, he once more resumed his pen, and at length succeeded in achieving a letter to the chevalier. He merely announced his engagement to the daughter of Sir Philip Courtenay, and earnestly requested his uncle's permission to intrust her with the secret of

their family affairs, pointing out the embarrassment he had experienced in seeing her depart without clearing up the mystery which hung round his name. Perhaps William was not judicious in one of the arguments which he adduced, namely, that there could be little use in endeavouring to keep the matter a secret, since he had already met two men, in Bordeaux, who were acquainted with the whole transaction, and a third whom he shrewdly believed to be so. This letter remained long unanswered, although William entreated for a speedy reply, and announced his intention of awaiting it at Bordeaux.

Madame D'Aubry's servant, who returned in due time from England, brought with him a small billet for William, which Blanch enclosed in a letter to her aunt, and which gave him the more pleasure, as it had been stipulated between them, that they should not correspond after her arrival at home, except on an occasion of sickness, or any emergency; a plan proposed by Blanch, and acceded to the more readily by William, as he dreaded the risk of a premature discovery.

It might be about a month after her de-

parture, that Clifford received the following summons from De Brissac :

“ He is going—I know it would grieve you both not to meet again. Supper will be served at the usual hour—I shall expect you ; but be prudent and composed, for the sake of

“ LOUIS.”

Clifford found the general seated at table with Dumont and two officers of gendarmerie. As he entered, De Brissac pressed his hand :—“ Gentlemen,” he said, addressing the strangers, “ I present to your notice a young English friend of mine, who has lived among us for many months.—M. Dumont, you remember William Clifford.”

Dumont looked up, and saluted his friend with a cold, unruffled courtesy, that sent William’s blood back to his heart. The others eyed the new comer, and then bowing distantly, proceeded in the important occupation in which they were engaged.

William took the vacant seat which was placed between the general, who presided at the head of the table, and one of the officers, while, to his regret, Dumont sat at the same side; so that all means of communication were

thus cut off, and even the prisoner's countenance concealed. He endeavoured to converse, and fortunately the unusual style of his language was obvious only to those two, who understood the cause. Clifford watched with painful anxiety the hand that was occasionally extended, and listened with the same degree of interest to every breath the prisoner drew.

Dumont did not speak often; but when he did, it was in the same easy, unembarrassed tone that was natural to him.

William's position was most distressing: he felt that every moment lessened his chance of communication with the prisoner, while the general, who remarked every change of his favourite's countenance, almost regretted the test to which he had put his self-command.

The repast was finished, and Louis de Brissac, who loved old customs, proposed to his guests to form a circle round the hearth, and discuss the merits of his Lafitte. The relative positions were maintained, and William had almost abandoned every hope, when a little incident occurred, which he contrived to turn to some advantage. Before the fire lay a large dog, of a peculiar breed, the property of the youngest

of the officers, who was not a little flattered by the admiration which his favourite excited. William in particular won the owner's heart, by frequently caressing and noticing the noble animal.

"He is my constant companion and friend," exclaimed the gendarmes; "we are never apart, and understand each other perfectly. Do we not, Pepin?" he added, stroking the dog as he spoke.

"You are indeed to be envied," replied William, "and I hope you may be more fortunate than I have been; for, some time back, I sustained an irreparable loss, in just such a friend." (He smiled as he laid a peculiar emphasis on the word.) "He was to me what Pepin is to you; but I have never seen him since one day—I recollect it well—about six weeks ago; it was on a Thursday—the day after Madame D'Aubry's grand fête, you know, general."

"And have you never discovered any trace of him?" inquired the officer, in a tone of sympathy.

"Yes," replied William, "I am sure I saw him once; but it was in a crowd, and he did not appear to recognise me; nor did he ever offer

to advance towards me ; and yet it must have been Gaston, for there was not such another in the whole world."

"That was strange," observed De Brissac : "but perhaps he was too closely watched."

"Possibly," rejoined William ; "but I cannot express the sorrow and disappointment it caused me. I lost sight of him before I could arrive at the spot ; but I do assure you—" He turned towards the officer, and repeated his asseveration, "I would go any where, I would take any steps that would afford the slightest chance of recovering him."

"I remember once," observed Dumont, in a careless tone, "having the same misfortune about a large dog of the Pyrenean breed, which I valued highly. I was in the country at the time, and every inquiry was made, but in vain. Shortly after, I went to Paris, and although several months had elapsed, I had not relinquished all hopes of recovering the animal. meeting one day with a vender of dogs, I described my loss, and offered him a large sum, to be paid any day that he would either bring me the dog, or procure some tidings of him. 'I have no doubt, monsieur,' replied the

man, ‘that he is at this moment in Paris. I have had several of mine stolen, and invariably found them here; indeed,’ added he, laughing heartily at his own joke, ‘if I missed one of my tribe in Grand Cairo, I should feel sure of meeting him the next time I set foot upon the Boulevards.’ To be sure we are many miles from the capital here; but, according to my friend the dog vender’s reasoning, Paris is the receptacle for all stolen goods.”

“One thing is certain,” replied the officer, laughing, “it will give Monsieur l’Anglais, here, a good excuse for setting off for Paris immediately to find his dog, or make his fortune, whichever you will, —, instead of wasting his time here in the provinces! Poor Pepin, I must contrive to get you safe out of Bordeaux before the rascals catch a glimpse of you.”

He stooped forward to caress his favourite, and William, seizing the opportunity (and secure from the scrutiny of the other officer, who was now indulging in a profound nap), darted a look of anxious inquiry on Dumont. A smile of affectionate intelligence played round the prisoner’s lips for one moment, and by the time the officer had recovered his position,

William's attention was engrossed by the curiously-constructed collar which adorned Pepin's throat.

"I do not intend," he said, smiling, "to waste my time, as you are pleased to call it, much longer, monsieur; but, in my way to England, I shall certainly remain some time in Paris; for, when last there, I was too young to enter into the merits of your great capital."

The praises showered upon his dog, the excellence of the general's claret, and the recollection of Paris, had a most *animating* effect upon the spirits of the young officer.

He treated the society to an elaborate description of the manners and customs of the French metropolis, intermixed and, as he thought, enlivened by many a scandalous anecdote; and then suddenly starting from his seat, he awoke his comrade, by shouting a volley of oaths into his ear. After which, cursing him repeatedly for his laziness, he begged the governor would give orders for their departure.

In a few minutes the rumbling wheels of a carriage were heard in the courtyard, and the clattering of horses' hoofs, which induced William to believe that the prisoner was to be



conveyed in a coach, guarded by an escort of horse.

While the two officers were enveloping themselves in their heavy cloaks, and one ridiculed the other for his slow and sleepy movements, Dumont advanced towards the general, and extended his hand. The old man's shook in returning the friendly pressure.

"God bless you," he said, "may you never regret the Fort du Hà."

"General," said Dumont, with the air of a monarch, who knows that every word will be remembered, "may the recollection of your conduct to me cheer your latest moments."

Here the gendarmes inquired if the prisoner were ready, and he replied in the affirmative. The general then took leave of his guests, with the hope of seeing them again, and inquired if he could serve Dumont in any way.

"No," replied the prisoner; "except, indeed, by taking care of the laurel which I planted in the garden."

Once more he pressed De Brissac's hand; and then, preceded and followed by one of the guards, he left the apartment, but not until he had turned hastily, before his sleepy guardian

could detect his intention, to cast a glance upon William, that showed how much he grieved at the separation, although prudence forbade him to express it openly.

The door closed, and, in a few moments, the sound of receding wheels told Clifford that another tie which had bound him to Bordeaux was snapped asunder.

When they were alone, De Brissac turned to the young Englishman.

“To you,” he said, “I commit the care of Dumont’s laurel; there may be more leaves on that tree than we think for.” He was silent, as if awaiting an answer, and then continued. “I will not inquire into your future plans, William, or how far you may be influenced by the hope of seeing Dumont again; but, believe me, that will be most difficult, for the profoundest secrecy is observed regarding his destination. One thing, however, I trust, that while you remain in Bordeaux we may often meet, oftener than hitherto. I am sadly changed: I have a horror of solitude, that it is difficult to account for; unless, indeed, it arises from a dislike to ponder over the gradual decay of my own frame. I have never shunned

death; but it is sad to feel every energy of body and mind gradually decrease."

"I will not leave you, unless I am compelled to do so," replied William, earnestly; "it will be a consolation to myself to possess the knowledge that I can afford you any. Will you make me your prisoner, general, instead of Dumont, until letters, which I am daily expecting, call me away?"

Charmed by this proposition, De Brissac would not let Clifford depart until he had promised to return on the morrow, and take up his abode in the fortress, at least for some little time. William found a melancholy pleasure in walking in the little garden, and above all, tending the laurel which Dumont had planted with his own hands. He was actively employed in this service one day, when he fancied that he perceived something white protruding from the mould. On examining further, he discovered a paper, and the general's words instantly recurred to his mind. It bore his own initials, and having divested it as much as possible of the earth, which had worked its way in between the folds, he read as follows:—"Follow me to Paris, and when there, leave no means

untried to see me. Do not go to England on any account until we have met: strange as it may appear, there is more than a possibility of my serving you in the object of your ambition. I have no time to repeat my words; let them weigh in your determination.—GASTON.”

Clifford read the note over many times, until he had imprinted every syllable upon his memory, and then tore it in a thousand pieces.

From this time he devoted himself to a constant attendance upon the governor, and observed with sincere grief the rapid strides with which death was approaching that excellent old man. Yet, excepting the outward signs of disease and suffering, Louis de Brissac, when in the society of his young friend, appeared the same cheerful, single-hearted being as formerly, with the same disregard for himself, and attention to others. He would urge, nay insist, upon William's leaving him, to mix once more in society; and when Clifford refused to do so, the general would endeavour to appear angry, until he heard from the young man's lips that Bordeaux had no longer any charms for him, excepting by the fireside of the governor. De Brissac never touched upon the subject of

Blanch's departure, for Clifford had never alluded to it, and he consequently supposed that all idea of that alliance had been given up. They would sit together, the old and the young, with their age, appearance, character, and prospects, all essentially different, and yet attuned by sentiments of gratitude on one side, and unfeigned affection on the other. For hours together would William divert the old man with the account of his travels in distant lands, or in compliance with the general's frequent request, sing to him, in that sweet low voice which could find its way to De Brissac's as to Blanch's heart.

Days lengthened into weeks, and weeks were striding into months, and William, whose every hope was centred on the journey to Paris, since Dumont's mysterious communication, felt that every hour might lower him in Blanch's estimation, and heighten the obstacles between them. He at length received a short and unsatisfactory letter from his uncle, forbidding him, on pain of his lasting displeasure, to mention the circumstances of his disgrace to Blanch. The fact of her being a woman was in itself

sufficient to render such communication dangerous; but above all at this moment, when she was at the court of George the First, to whom her father was devoted. The chevalier enjoined patience: he would think the matter over; and in the mean time, he recommended change of scene, and a journey to Paris, as the best means of diverting his nephew's thoughts. Every thing combined to increase William's impatience to leave Bordeaux, but the increasing illness of De Brissac chained him to the spot. He could not leave that kind and generous friend to die alone; no subsequent happiness, no future success could ever stifle the remorse which such a step would have entailed. He concealed the difficulty of his position from the general, who, he well knew, would urge his departure, and strove to drown every reflection in the hope of repaying, in some measure, De Brissac's kindness.

To Madame D'Aubry, whom he now but rarely saw, he enjoined the task of acquainting Blanch with the cause of his detention at Bordeaux, but she invariably replied, that it was most difficult to do so without mentioning his

name, or couching the message in such terms as would excite the suspicion of her parents, who would of course see the letters she received.

Clifford gathered from this evasive reply, and from the hesitation with which Madame D'Aubry spoke, that she had neither done, nor did she intend to do his bidding; for in this instance fear triumphed over every other feeling.

Often, when the general was sleeping, William would sit and ponder over these and other circumstances; with his eager mind, fretted and chafed by the curb that checked his impatience and compelled him to inaction, until haunted by a thousand doubts and fears, wrought to a climax by the intensity of passion, he would rise from his seat, and pace the room in a state almost of distraction, half resolved to set out for Paris that very moment. But as he paused before the wasted form of De Brissac, and gazed upon those venerable features, where death had already placed his seal, and which, beneath the influence of sleep, scarcely displayed any of the characteristics of life, then the noble heart of William Clifford would repel the thought, and expand with nearly filial affection towards that good old man. There were times, indeed, when

De Brissac appeared so cheerful, that William almost fancied his health might be restored by care and vigilance ; but he relinquished all hope when, one evening, the general was seized with sudden and violent delirium.

Clifford watched by his bedside many long and weary nights, listening to his incoherent and rambling speeches, and regretting the violence which gradually undermined his scanty remains of strength. He raved principally of the late king and Dumont ; promising the former that he would never disclose any secret connected with the latter ; but frequently addressing William with an entreaty not to leave him—then suddenly breaking forth into a heartrending lamentation at his absence ; and all this, with his eyes fixed upon that faithful friend, whose attendance was more unremitting than ever.

It was towards the termination of the sixth night, that, perceiving the general in a calm and profound sleep, such as he had not enjoyed since the commencement of the delirium, William yielded to the physician's entreaties, and, leaving him to watch by the invalid, stole out of the room to seek the repose which he had long denied himself. He slept for several hours,



and was roused about the middle of the day by the entrance of the general's physician, who came to announce that De Brissac had awoke, free from delirium, and insisted upon seeing all the despatches. "He even threatened to rise, which, in his present weak state, would be highly improper," continued Monsieur L——; "but I trust I have dissuaded him from so rash a step. Although I could not succeed with regard to the despatches, we must therefore hope that the communications are trifling and insignificant; for, believe me, the slightest excitement might be fatal. I left him, according to his wish, about an hour ago, and he has just sent me word that he is most anxious to see you, M. Clifford; and I feel sure you will remember my injunctions, and endeavour to keep his mind as quiet as possible."

William lost no time in descending to the general's apartment, whom, to his surprise and regret, he found sitting up, and dressed in full uniform, while on the table lay a despatch bag and several papers.

There was a beaming expression on De Brissac's countenance, which impressed Clifford with the idea that he had received some pleas-

ing intelligence. His cheek was flushed, and his eye bright, although it still bore a wild and haggard look, the trace of recent delirium. He made Clifford sit beside him, and thus spoke to him cheerfully, though his voice was hollow, and he appeared to articulate with difficulty.

“How grateful I am,” he said, as he pressed William’s hand, “that I have been spared to see this day. Perhaps you heard that a special messenger arrived last night, but you did not know the news he brought me !”

The general put a letter into Clifford’s hand, which bore the sign and seal of Philip, Duke of Orleans, Regent of France, the purport of which was—though couched in that language of etiquette and ceremony, which requires a whole page to convey the meaning of a simple sentence—that the regent, in looking over some papers of his late majesty, discovered the copy of an official letter among them (bearing the date of a short time previous to the king’s death), in which his majesty signified his intention of bestowing the first vacancy of knight grand cross of the royal and military order of St. Louis on General de Brissac, commandant, &c. The regent here copied several words of en-

comium from the king's own letter, and then proceeded to say, that it had ever been his study to fulfil the slightest injunctions of his lamented sovereign and kinsman, and he would therefore no longer delay pressing upon General De Brissac the acceptance of a vacancy in the order, which had most opportunely occurred.

While William read the letter, weighing in his mind how far the politic regent's discovery might be influenced by the wish of sealing the veteran's lips, and engrossing his latest thoughts, by a gift that could in fact be considered little better than a loan, in the present state of De Brissac's health, the eager-minded general was engaged in a scrutiny of the cross, star, and ribbon, that accompanied the letter.

"What do you think of that?" he inquired, with a smile of honest pride, as Clifford returned the precious document.

"I think," replied the other gravely, "that it must be a source of real gratification to find that you were remembered in the king's latest moments; and I trust that this (he pointed to the letter) will prove a more efficient remedy for your present illness than any that have been hitherto administered."

“Yes!” exclaimed De Brissac, eagerly, “yes! in his latest moments, when the affairs of France, nay, of the world itself, were pressing on his mind, that he should have remembered me or that trifling service, which any Christian would have rendered to another!”

He paused for a few moments, and then added more seriously,

“Do you know, William, it appears to me like a message from the tomb, to remind me that I should not repine at leaving a world which can no longer boast of possessing Louis the Great. Give me your arm, William, and assist me to cross this ribbon over my right shoulder; I should scorn an humbler squire on such an occasion.”

He rose with difficulty, in spite of Clifford’s remonstrances, and, leaning on his arm, talked for some time in a half-serious half-jesting mood; but William observed with concern many visible signs of excitement manifesting themselves in his countenance and deportment. De Brissac then, still leaning on his friend, made him advance into the centre of the apartment, while by degrees his eye again assumed that wildness which had characterized it for several days before.

The young Englishman was now seriously alarmed; but his entreaties that the general would compose himself and sit down, were of no effect, for De Brissac displayed an obstinacy that was unnatural to him. He answered peevishly, and then quarrelled with Clifford for having placed the star on the wrong side.

“I feel perfectly well,” he continued, “and will no longer remain a prisoner in this dismal room. Will you order our horses, William? I have long intended to call upon the prefect, and will do so to-day.—You shake your head! and, I see, suppose me weak enough to wish his majesty benefits known in Bordeaux!” He grasped William’s arm convulsively, and then looked into his face as if he would have read his soul.

“Did you tell me that the king appeared by night to the Duke of Orleans, with the cross in his hand?—It is the more sacred, then, for he is in heaven.—Why do you look so sorrowful, William Clifford? It was not my fault that Dumont was taken away from us.—Holy Virgin! are you a coward to stand there so still when the king’s horse lies dead beneath him? Mother of Heaven! another moment, and Louis had been no more.”

“For God’s sake, general,” exclaimed Clif-

ford, in a voice trembling with grief and anxiety, "be calm. Let me assist you to your bed, and call Monsieur L—— into the room."

"No, no," cried De Brissac, impatiently; "no more physicians for me. It is you who protract my recovery by talking in this manner.—I am quite well—quite strong now, and you wish to confine me to that horrid place where I have raved like a madman. No physicians for me! Call no one; but if you are tired of this dull life, leave me! I can stand without your assistance."

As he spoke he endeavoured to advance a few steps, but staggered back, and again submitted to Clifford's support. He grew, however, more vehement in his language, more changed in his appearance, till at last, tearing the cross from the ribbon, he pressed it eagerly to his lips. "See!" he cried, "that is the image of Saint Louis, but there are two saints now of that name in the kingdom of heaven, and one beckons me to him. Blessed mother of God, give me entrance there!" He crossed his arms upon his breast and half-closed his eyes, while an expression of devotional calm reposed for a few seconds upon his pallid countenance; then opening his eyes he stared wildly around, and

raising his arm, as if in the act of leading on his troops, he shouted, "God and Saint Denis!" in a loud and almost unearthly tone, that made William shudder and avert his head. As he did so, he felt De Brissac weigh heavily upon him, so heavily, that, unprepared as he was, Clifford sank upon one knee, and received the dying form of the old soldier in his arms. The head rested on his shoulder, the lips moved, and the agitated young man stooped forward to catch the last accents of his friend, and with deep emotion heard his own name faintly murmured. One struggle, one hollow rattling sound in the throat, and the soul of De Brissac was gone to its last account!

William had seen death, but he had never before watched the departure of one he loved; and as he gazed on the emaciated, though still noble form, that lay senseless at his feet, and felt in vain for the beating of that loyal heart, which could beat no longer, he bent earnestly over the senseless form; and, when he again raised his head, the cold, inanimate features of the corpse, were bathed in tears, such as manhood need not blush to own.

## CHAPTER XIII.

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WILLIAM Clifford was in Paris; that Paris which for so many months had formed the theme of his solitary musings. Long and often had he dwelt upon the prospect of his arrival there, until by degrees he had accustomed himself to the belief, that at Paris every difficulty would be overcome and his destiny assume a fairer aspect. So vague and uncertain indeed was the future which lay before him, that William might be excused for grasping at the slightest hope which bore a tangible form, even though that hope were founded on so slight a basis as the words of a captive.

Yet as he entered the large city, then plunged in all the dissipation for which the regency was remarkable, he felt his hopes recede with every step he took. The noise, the traffic, and turmoil of the streets; the swarms of inhabitants of every class and description,



each intent on their individual errand; the multiplicity of vehicles, the confused murmur of tongues, the coarse joke, and the shrill laugh, interrupted by the cry of the itinerant tradesman:—all these, and many other characteristics of a vast and populous city, had the effect of depressing Clifford's spirits; and hastening towards the appointed hotel, he panted for the silence of his own apartment, and the freedom of his own thoughts.

The last year of his life had been passed in the comparatively small town of Bordeaux, where, owing to the accidental meeting with De Brissac, he had never been considered as a perfect stranger. The general's acquaintance became his; every society was open to the friend of the commandant; and there, in course of time, he had contracted those ties of love and friendship which, while they bound him to Blanch and Dumont, endeared the scene of so much happiness.

The heart that has long been accustomed to the sweet dependence of affection, shrinks within itself amid the loneliness of a crowd!

Clifford was at this moment impressed with a melancholy which he had never experienced

before; and all the objects round him forced upon his mind the reflection that, alone in the world of Paris, without a single acquaintance or connexion, it would be madness to dream of effecting an entrance into any of the state prisons, even supposing he could discover into which Dumont had been thrown.

The young man meditated on the path he was to pursue; and while inclination led him to shun the splendid society of Paris, mature reflection urged an entirely opposite course. He must frequent the court, become known to the principal inhabitants of the city, and, avoiding carefully every thing that was calculated to arouse suspicion, he must gradually league himself with those who were capable of serving him in the affair of Dumont, while the possibility of meeting the Duke de P—— frequently recurred to his mind.

The will of De Brissac, which, according to the old man's desire, had been opened in his dear son's presence (for by that name had he frequently addressed him during his last illness), constituted Clifford executor, and sole heir of all his property, both landed and personal; for the general had taken proper measures to remove all legal difficulties relating to

the succession of an alien. The total amount (although not very considerable if regarded as a fortune), combined with his former pittance, was wealth to Clifford. He installed the two old servants of his benefactor in the Chateau de Brissac, demanding no other service from them than the care of the house; and then, unencumbered by any expense attending an establishment, he found himself comparatively a rich man.

Clifford, though he despised the petty meanness which actuates the mass of human nature, was too wise not to turn it to advantage when compelled to come in contact with selfish and timeserving spirits. He was well aware, that the arrival of an humble individual with a scanty retinue would pass utterly unnoticed, but that the proprietor of the inn would gladly spread the report that he had the honour of entertaining a distinguished guest.

Clifford having arrived at the unpleasant conclusion that he had a part to play during his sojourn at Paris, determined to enter upon the *rôle* immediately, the first scene of which was to be acted with his landlord. He therefore summoned the person in question, and, with a pomp that was foreign to his nature, and

which he scorned in secret, the young Englishman announced to his admiring host, that, on the following morning, he should require a suite of apartments more spacious and commodious. Then, with a condescension which flattered the man's self-love, Clifford consulted him on the choice of a coachmaker, and required his assistance in procuring a suitable retinue of servants. After which, he made some casual inquiries relative to the hour at which the regent generally granted his audiences, and then, as mine host himself described it, "he dismissed me with a gracious expression of satisfaction."

The stratagem succeeded admirably. The landlord left his guest's presence duly impressed with a sense of his dignity, and that very night it was known in most quarters of Paris that a foreigner of distinction had arrived upon a diplomatic mission, and taken up his abode at the Chevalier de Malte.

Shortly afterwards Clifford demanded an audience of the regent, for the purpose of restoring to his highness the insignia of the general's order.

The Duke of Orleans received him most graciously, and Clifford fancied he could detect

a smile of triumph at the success of his plan (for as such William had always considered the sudden and wonderful discovery of the late king's letter). With the truly royal predilection for interrogatory, the regent questioned William closely about the general, and the system he exercised in the Fort du Hà. But William answered his highness in an easy, unembarrassed manner, and, perfectly aware that his inquiries pointed to Dumont, mentioned him carelessly in conjunction with the mass of prisoners, and without specifying his name. When the inquisitive prince thought fit to touch upon Clifford's own concerns, the latter stifled the rising spirit of resentment, and explained to his highness, that, having been detained at Bordeaux, on his road to Paris, the society proved so attractive, and General de Brissac so kind, that he prolonged his stay until the death of that worthy veteran, who crowned his former acts of friendship by leaving him heir to all his possessions.

The goodhumoured prince was delighted by the young Englishman's manner and address, and though he at first appeared resolved on inquiring further into the cause of De Brissac's generosity, and was anxious to know if Wil-

liam often frequented the fortress; yet the replies he received were so well managed, that his highness soon turned the conversation on other subjects. He conversed for some time in English, called William, jestingly, the Baron de Brissac (a title he might claim in right of his small terre), commanded his frequent presence at the palace, and even invited him to his own private entertainments. The interview had been most satisfactory in every way; William descended the stairs, and as he stepped into his new coach to return home, attended by several servants in gaudy liveries, more than one fair face peered from the windows of the palace—perhaps to catch a glimpse of *Le bel Anglais*.

Clifford, however, purposely allowed some time to elapse without seeking society, occasionally submitting to the interchange of formal civility with those courtiers whom the regent deputed to do the honours of Paris, and show him all that was interesting and difficult of access to strangers. But at length growing impatient, William threw himself upon his horse one morning at an early hour, and rode, unattended, in the direction of Versailles, to meditate upon his future plans. The day was fine, the sun shone brightly upon the palace and

gardens, and William, after placing his horse in safety, entered the royal grounds.

The palace of Versailles is too well known to need any description here. It had for many years served as a residence to Louis the Fourteenth; but on his demise the regent judged it best to place the young king immediately under his own eye, and the youthful monarch was accordingly established in the Tuileries. William wandered through the long green alleys, and paced up and down the sunny terraces without meeting another human being, a circumstance which was the more agreeable to him at that moment, inasmuch as it permitted him to indulge for some time without interruption in a long and luxurious revery. He was startled, however, at length, by feeling a hand placed upon his shoulder, and hearing himself addressed in a familiar voice. He turned round and beheld Roland Stanley, whose countenance expressed such unfeigned pleasure at the meeting, that William, in returning the friendly greeting, felt his heart warm towards the associate of his happy days.

“I knew it was you,” exclaimed Stanley, “though I had no idea of your arrival in these parts. But as I ran my eye down the terrace,

and saw a solitary man in a pensive attitude, I said to myself, there stands William Clifford; and right glad am I to see you, even though you may wish me as many miles off as you did when we last met at Bordeaux. But do tell me what has brought you here; for, when I left that good city, you were in close attendance upon our old friend the general."

Clifford related in brief terms the death and generosity of the governor, and his own intention of remaining some time in Paris, an intelligence which afforded Stanley sincere pleasure. Drawing William's arm within his own, he conversed for some time upon Bordeaux, in a manner that was most grateful to his companion, delicately avoiding, however, any pointed allusion to Blanch. Then changing the subject of conversation, he commenced a catalogue of the court beauties and gallants, their qualities and peculiarities, with a vivacity that displayed to the best advantage his knowledge of men and manners, while Clifford listened with attention to information that might be valuable. At length interrupting the speaker in an animated description of the dowager Duchess of Orleans, he directed his attention to the end of one of those long green alleys in which the gardens of



Versailles abound, inquiring, “Who is that in so curious a costume? Even at this distance there is something remarkable in her air.”

“Right, right!” replied Stanley, laughing; “I applaud your discrimination, and will endeavour to make you acquainted with her before I expose you to the dangers of a presentation. That fair object at the end of the *Allée verte*, is the fascinating Mirabel; the original, the witty, the beautiful Baronne de Bernay. She is an orphan, who appeared at court when very young, as maid of honour to Madame d’Orleans, where she speedily excited the envy of her own sex, and the admiration of ours: but fabled adamant is soft in comparison to the relentless heart of the fair Mirabel. ‘*Belle et cruelle*,’ ‘*La charmante Moqueuse*,’ ‘*L’Admirable*,’ are among the many epithets by which she is known. Half Paris, headed by the regent, languish at her feet; and while she disdains none of those little arts of coquetry which she exercises in a manner all her own, the obdurate beauty rejoices in the pangs of her victim, aggravates his mortification by playful raillery, and at the same time confesses her intention of extending her conquests. I am told that she is a female Crichton, succeeding

in every thing she attempts ; and as far as conversation goes, I can vouch for her superiority whenever she chooses to exert it. The dress you have remarked, is adapted to the exercise of horsemanship, in which she excels, displaying a fearlessness of spirit that would put many of his majesty's body-guard to shame. " They tell an anecdote, and I believe a true one, which is not a little characteristic. On the evening of a day during which she had given some striking proof of her courage, the regent being informed of the circumstance, thought fit to express his admiration in animated terms, and was repulsed with more than usual disdain. The Duchess of Orleans happening to saunter up to the spot, and remarking the unusual gravity of her royal consort, looked first at him, and then at her maid of honour, and inquired carelessly, if they had been arranging the affairs of the state. ' Yes madame,' exclaimed the regent, in a tone of evident mortification ; ' I have been pressing the office of generalissimo of the forces on the Baronne de Bernay : it is a post for which she is admirably qualified ; as neither timidity nor humanity would ever deter her from extending the conquests of France, or making an example of its enemies.'—' I am

sensible of the honour your highness intends me,' replied Mirabel, with mock gravity, curt-seying profoundly at the same time; 'but I would rather prosecute the campaign of Paris, where my conquests are more to be depended upon, and where I daily experience the triumph of revenging myself on my own individual enemies.' She has many strange fancies," continued Stanley, "and amongst others, that of attiring herself in every possible variety of costume; one evening the sultana's turban decks her hair, while on the next, the short robe of the Spaniard displays her unrivalled foot and ankle. But I am not sufficiently versed in these matters to give you an adequate account of the caprices of her toilet. Yet, if I may so express myself, there is a consistency even in her inconsistency; an all-prevailing variety in dress, mood, appearance and manner: nor does it follow because to-day she is merry and talkative, that the next time you meet her she will be the same. I hope, Clifford," added Stanley, as he hastily concluded his long description, "that by inflaming your curiosity, I have not excited you to attempt a useless siege upon the heart of the merciless Mirabel."

William shook his head—"Hush, hush!" he exclaimed; "she approaches, and will overhear you." As he spoke, the baronne advanced, and he had an opportunity of seeing her more distinctly.

Mirabel de Bernay was considerably below the usual height: her limbs small, but beautifully formed; and as she moved forward with an elastic step, her figure assumed a character of childish grace, that was counterbalanced by its full and rounded sympathy. Her hair, glossy black, but soft and silken as the flaxen locks of a Rowena, was plaited in one long tress behind, while the breeze, and the exercise she had taken, had disordered the somewhat formal arrangement of the front, which escaping from beneath a velvet hat (duly looped and plumed), hung round her face in negligence not unbecoming. The complexion of Mirabel was of that rich clear brown which she inherited from a Spanish mother, while the bright blue eye, the small fair hand, and taper ankle, bespoke her alliance with the aristocracy of the north. She wore a long and ample robe of white satin, which she however gathered up with one hand, in such a manner as enabled her to walk with freedom, and

at the same time to display the small white shoe, with its appendage of red heel and diamond buckle. A Joseph (or closely fitting coat) of green velvet, richly laced, with gold buttons, an embroidered waistcoat, with cravat and ruffles of point lace, and a broad scarlet sash completed her costume. In her hand she held a small whip, with which she occasionally exerted a gentle authority over a large greyhound that accompanied her; and at a respectful distance lingered a female attendant, and two grooms in livery.

“Ha, Mr. Stanley!” exclaimed the lively beauty, after that gentleman had gone through the ceremony of presenting his friend; “I should never have suspected you of such matutinal propensities: why our good citizens of Paris are but just awake. Alack! I know not where a poor damsel like myself can hope for solitude, if it is not to be found at this hour in the shades of deserted Versailles.”

“I would do my best, madam,” said Stanley, bowing low as he spoke, “to deter you from indulging in a taste for solitude that would deprive society of its greatest charm, and the court of its brightest ornament.”

“ I had been taught to believe, sir,” said Mirabel, gaily, turning to Clifford, “ that Englishmen never succeeded in the complimentary mien ; but your countryman is anxious to prove that the air of Paris has had a beneficial effect upon his gallantry.”

William felt at this moment in the predicament of a person who finds himself unexpectedly called upon to reply in an unfamiliar language, and he was truly grateful when Stanley came to his aid.

“ Nay, madam,” he said, “ that is but a feeble acknowledgment of the service of one whose highest glory consists in declaring himself the humblest and most devoted of your slaves.”

The baronne laughed : “ You never told me this before,” she said ; “ but to-day I will add you to my list. I have a curious chaplet, which serves me to tell my beads on ; a heterogeneous string of all the hearts which have owned my power—and I do not know,” she added archly, putting her finger on her lip, “ I do not know why the heart of a staunch Jacobite should not figure among those of prince, peer, and prelate.”

Thus saying, she moved forward with a slight inclination of the head ; but as she did so, her

riding-whip fell at Clifford's feet. He raised it from the ground. Mirabel bent forward to receive it, and casting a glance on William, in which all the fire and brilliancy of her eye were subdued into a glance very different from that which she had bestowed on his companion, she bowed her thanks to him individually, and once more saluting the two companions, passed on.

"That was a glance," exclaimed Stanley, when they were again alone, "for which his highness would wellnigh have bartered his vice-royalty, and for which the little Comte de Salins would have solicited the permission of running his small sword through your body."

"It is a pity," replied William, drily, "that such a gift should have been wasted on one totally incapable of appreciating its value. By Heavens! Stanley, this specimen of rigid virtue impresses me with a due respect for the manners of the fair Parisians."

"When you speak of the crowd," answered Stanley, with more seriousness than before, "I will confess to you that nothing can be more degraded; but your judgment of Mirabel de Bernay has been too hasty. Her character, though faulty in the extreme, has many noble

points, believe me. And when you consider the situation in which she is placed, and the examples by which she is surrounded, you will surely find something to admire. Besides, Clifford," he added, with studied but emphatic gravity, "it were hopeless to look elsewhere for that virtue and excellence which are, perhaps, only to be found in one solitary and brilliant instance."

William understood, nor was he ungrateful for, the allusion; and as they mounted their horses at the same time, he begged Stanley would accompany him to the Chevalier de Malte, and partake of the dinner that would be prepared. As they rode slowly forward, the fair amazon overtook them at full speed, managing her fiery horse with a dexterity that elicited William's admiration, even while he condemned her eagerness to display her skill.

That night Blanch rose before him in all her native dignity more vividly than she had ever appeared before, in those visions that were sanctified by her presence.



CHAPTER XIV.

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THE regent had formed a very favourable opinion of Clifford during the audience which he had granted to him. There was something in the young foreigner's manner and conversation which greatly struck the Duke of Orleans; the more so, as they were essentially different from those of his own courtiers. An easy, open, and unembarrassed address, tempered by courtesy and respect; a firmness in asserting his own opinions, while he avoided contradicting those of the duke, unless immediately referred to him; combined with a polished, though lively demeanour, were strangely contrasted with the fawning adulation, and the unbecoming familiarity, which characterized the two distinct classes of the regent's associates.

His highness condescended to present Clif-

ford himself to the various members of the royal family, who all received him well, and were graciously pleased to signify their pleasure at seeing him frequently at the palace.

The young duchess, whose indolence was proverbial, and who, in consequence of her early education, had little taste for the duties of a public life, often allowed weeks to elapse without leaving her own apartments ; but the duchess-dowager, who loved ceremony, invariably presided at the receptions. This princess honoured William with her particular notice, and appeared to derive much pleasure from his conversation. She was an eccentric woman, plain in person and violent in temper, but gifted with a shrewdness of observation, and a fluency of language, that rendered her an agreeable and rational companion. There existed but little sympathy between herself and her daughter-in-law ; but she entertained a sincere affection for the regent, though his behaviour but too frequently incurred her censure. She, however, as well as the whole court, was now busy in preparing for the marriage of her youngest grand-daughter, Mademoiselle de Valois. That unfortunate and erring princess, in

the violence of her grief for the imprisonment of the Duke de Richelieu, who had implicated himself in the Alberoni conspiracy, could no longer conceal the passion she entertained for that unprincipled man.

The regent, who had long and vainly pressed his daughter's acceptance of the Prince of Modena, now informed her that an immediate consent to this marriage was the only price at which her lover's freedom and safety could be purchased. Such was the princess's infatuation for a man, who had repaid her affection by plotting against the life of her father, that she consented to the dreadful sacrifice; and festivities were already preparing to celebrate this inauspicious union.

Having made this necessary digression, we will return to Clifford, who now became more frequent in his attendance upon the court, where the marked kindness of the royal family attracted the attention of others to its object; and the favour which he soon acquired with the duchess-dowager increased the notice of the ladies of the court in particular. They had been, from the first, struck by the beauty of his person, and the magnificence which he displayed in

his dress, equipage, and retinue ; while attention once drawn towards him was soon changed into admiration, by the grace of his manners and the freshness of his mind. There were no timid reserves in that libertine court. By degrees it became a fashion to talk of, to extol the handsome young Englishman, to repeat his sentiments, to dispute his preference, until, at length, Clifford found himself an object of undisguised admiration, and his contemptuous indifference, by piquing their vanity, only rendered the conquest more desirable to the fair but unscrupulous dames of Paris.

It appeared to them, indeed, incomprehensible how his heart could resist the artillery of glances, and the battery of sweet speeches by which he was daily assailed ; incomprehensible to all but such as knew that Blanch's image was the paladium which ensured the safety of the citadel.

Mirabel de Bernay's demeanour (according to Stanley's description) was totally different from that of any other person. She made no secret of preferring Clifford's society, and would often tell him that his conversation appeared a relief after the empty and frivolous discourse to which she usually listened.

The regent laughed when he saw them together, and cautioned the young Englishman against the snare; while Mirabel's rivals looked on in silent astonishment. The men, for the most part, disliked Clifford; nor could this be wondered at, their envy was excited by that sort of success which he neither courted nor valued; their anger was roused at his steady refusal to join in any of those excesses which then formed the reproach of Paris; and, above all, their self-love could ill brook the superiority to which they themselves could not be blind. The generality, in consequence, avoided a contact that would redound to their disadvantage; while some affected to despise the virtue, and ridicule the excellence which they could not attain.

There was, however, a manly dignity in Clifford that exacted courtesy, in the payment of which no one had yet failed. The Comte de Salins indeed (the baronne's diminutive suitor), regarded Clifford with a jealous eye, and anxiously sought an opportunity of quarrelling, while William as carefully avoided an encounter where the odds must be so fearful against his dwarfish antagonist.

By some of the elder courtiers William was much liked ; and he occasionally encountered a follower of the De Brissac school, who by his dress and manner reminded him forcibly of that good old man.

Days and weeks however rolled over his head, and he became restless and uneasy ; Paris grew irksome to him, an unwilling witness of scenes which he detested ; he found himself no nearer his object than on his first arrival, and began to fear that he had made this sacrifice in vain. He was now convinced that his only chance of success, would be to plunge headlong in that torrent of intrigue and cabal, the mere sight of whose passing stream, was an object of disgust to him.

Nor had he one friend or counsellor in whom he could confide, not even Stanley, although his frequent companion. William was glad to secure an associate, whose conduct and conversation were regulated by some regard to propriety ; yet the consolation that his countryman afforded was counteracted by unceasing attempts to entangle Clifford in his schemes. Often would the eager Jacobite intrude his political confidence, in a manner most unpleas-

ing to his companion, who had not studied Roland Stanley's character in vain. William did not doubt the sincerity of his friendship. but he was well aware that every other consideration gave way before the "Cause." Nor was it improbable that Stanley might strive to aggravate the first difficulty in which William might be placed in order to gain him over to the Stuart party, well knowing that external circumstances, in many instances, can bring about the same changes of conduct as inward conviction.

Such was the state of our young Englishman's domestic and social affairs, when he received an invitation, in due form, to the masquerade and banquet, to be held at the Palais Royale, being the first of a succession of entertainments, given on the occasion of Mademoiselle de Valois's marriage.

Who shall tell, as William arrayed himself once more in his troubadour's costume, what thrilling and tender recollections the sight of that dress inspired? He placed the withered rose in his cap, slung his cithern upon his arm, and suspended the gold medallion from the chain which Blanch had given him.

His heart never had "wandered from its

allegiance ;” but it now beat with more loyalty than ever towards its lovely monarch. On his table lay a profusion of small scented billets, whose fair writers were anxious, by no very obscure hints, to inform M. Clifford of the disguises they would individually assume for the evening.

With a smile of derision he swept them from the table into the fire ; and as they consumed before his eyes, he raised Blanch’s miniature to his lips, and, concealing it in his bosom, took his way to the palace.

The exterior arrangements had been made with so much judgment, that there was little difficulty in entering ; and Clifford found himself speedily in the long gallery of the Palais Royale.

The *coup d’œil* was indeed magnificent ; an interminable suite of apartments, the style of whose splendid furniture was so renowned, as to form a new epoch in the calendar of taste, and be handed down for imitation to the present day, was illuminated with admirable variety. The saloons appropriated for dancing were dazzling with myriads of candelabras ; while the room set apart for music and conversation was hung with lamps, which shed a



soft and delicate light over its costly hangings of silk and velvet.

Here and there small and verdant bowers were constructed, with diminutive lamps of every colour (like the magic fruit of Aladdin), containing mossy seats, that invited to repose. But the greatest novelty consisted in the *Jardin des Plantes*, where a large and irregularly-shaped apartment was laid out in *parterres* and walks, with natural flowers and shrubs, in a manner that excited universal approbation. A small jet d'eau ornamented the centre, and formed a thousand little rainbows as it danced and sparkled in the light. Several urns and statues were distributed with taste, while the flowers, that by some singular deception appeared to flourish in the borders, had lost none of their fragrance, but attracted many persons by their sweetness from the distance of two or three rooms.

Clifford, after taking a hasty survey, recollected that it was incumbent upon him to seek the presence-chamber, where the royal family stood unmasked to receive their guests. This etiquette was to be observed for a short time, and then the regent, and all those who enjoyed

the diversion of masking, were to retire and disguise themselves.

As Clifford entered he had leisure to remark the royal circle. The young duchess, whose ungraceful figure was not improved by a negligent carriage, was magnificently attired, but her cheeks were flaming with paint, which made Mademoiselle de Valois's paleness appear more striking. That unhappy young woman stood by her mother's side, decorated with the jewels, and wearing the portrait, presented by her future bridegroom, who was already an object of hatred to her. Pale as ashes, her eyes swollen with weeping, she looked upon the scene before her as the condemned criminal on the preparations for his death ; while few of those who profited by the entertainment bestowed one thought upon the poor victim, whose sacrifice procured them a night of pleasure and diversion.

But William gazed with compassion upon the young creature who had so early fallen a prey to the allurements of vice, and was now about to stand before the altar of God, and pledge that heart to one man which was wholly possessed by another ! He looked at the relations who

surrounded her ; but her mother's affections were all centred in self, and the regent (though merciful by nature) had set his mind too long upon this marriage, to listen to any scruples at the moment his object was attained ; while the dowager, who had once loved her granddaughter, refused to exert any influence in behalf of one, who had forfeited all claim to her esteem. By the side of the Duchess of Orleans stood Mirabel de Bernay, her eye wandering eagerly over the arriving guests, and occasionally whispering her royal mistress, as if anxious for permission to join the motley crew. There was an archness in her eye, a suppressed merriment in her whole expression, which seemed to imply that she already anticipated a world of amusement.

The scene, the society, though all essentially different, nevertheless recalled the evening at the Hotel D'Aubry to Clifford's mind, and Stanley, who joined him soon after for a few moments, knew in what direction his thoughts were travelling.

But the spirit of masking was here better understood and sustained, and William was astonished at the rapidity with which new dresses

and new characters were assumed by the same person. He was soon in the midst of various groups of maskers: now a gorgeous sultana thrust her fan of peacock's feathers before his eyes; now an airy sylph invited him to join in the measured dance, or a pensive shepherdess tendered him a seat in her bower.

But in proportion as the rest of the world increased in animation and vivacity, William became more and more dejected. It was in vain that he attempted to rally his fallen spirits; that he determined to be amused with the prattle of the masks, and to admire the splendour and variety of the scene. The recollection of Blanch, her unartificial beauty, her modest graces, and feminine deportment, contrasted so strongly with the ladies of Philip's court by whom he was now surrounded, that it only brought her more vividly before him. William leaned against a column, and gave himself up to silent reflection.

Nor can many situations be more painful than that in which the merriment that we witness only helps to augment our individual melancholy; when the jest and laugh, in which we refuse to join, grate like discord on the ear, and when that

fancy, which has no sympathy with the present, steals sadly away on the backward path of retrospection. Thus the young mariner, when gazing upon the waves of a troubled and stormy sea, clings fondly to the recollection of his mother's home, and the sheltered seclusion of his native valley; and turns his eyes fondly over the waves in the direction, where last he saw the far and fading shores of his own dear land.

CHAPTER XV.

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CLIFFORD had almost determined upon retiring, when he was startled by a slight stroke upon his arm, attended with a jingling sound. He turned hastily, and beheld a mask in the characteristic garb of folly, wearing the cap and bells, and well-known motley. He at first paid but little attention to this singular apparition, but was at last drawn on to speak by the lively raillery of the mask.

“May I inquire,” he said, smiling faintly, “what happy chance has brought you in this direction?”

“Nay, gentle troubadour,” replied the mask, “that is but a simple question, though one easy to resolve.—Hast thou yet to learn that this good city of Paris is under my especial protection, and that my ancient crony, the Regent,

is but a puppet in the hands of Folly. As regards state affairs, indeed, I find him self-willed and perverse; but once let him leave the council-chamber, and he is all mine own. Men call him fickle and inconstant, but such has he never proved to me."

"But," said Clifford, "if your influence be so great, and your connexions so high, allow me to express my surprise that so humble an individual as myself should have attracted your notice."

"There again," replied the mask, "you both display your ignorance, and prove yourself my proselyte. It is my distinguishing attribute to shower favours upon the most deserving, without regard to rank or distinction. In this, our friend, the Duke of Orleans, whom I merely quoted as an example of the most devoted of my followers, emulates my example. '*Mais parlez de l'âne, et vous verrez ses oreilles,*' says the old proverb. Ha, ha! my friend Philipon! what not one kind word for your old favourite, Folly, with one of my fairest disciples on either arm?"

His highness, if such it were (for William's unpractised eye could not have detected him

in a group of three dominos who passed), nodded his head and laughed, though he hurried on lest the bystanders should benefit by the discovery.

“Well,” continued Clifford, who was somewhat diverted by this incident, “you were about to explain to me, most potent Folly —”

“That is easily done:—this is a night such as I have not seen for many a month; a night in which I walk abroad in gala robes—and here is the handsomest troubadour in the kingdom, the target for soft glances and balmy sighs, leaning like a wobegone Corydon against a marble pillar, when he should be leading the dance, or whispering sweet speeches to the fairest of France’s daughters. Think of my satisfaction when one single act thus ensures me a convert where I least hoped for such. And yet my doctrines propagate! and goodness knows, I have enough to do, with the German dowager’s nationality, the Duchess of Orleans’s indolence, Mademoiselle de Valois’s marriage, Mirabel de Bernay’s caprices, and John Law’s ascendancy—or, to strike more home, gentle troubadour—with Roland Stanley’s politics, and William Clifford’s insensibility!” Here the mask gave a side glance at a



domino, who had for some time past been hovering near them. “And last and *least*, with the little Comte de Salins’s valour:—do you know, sir troubadour, his diminutive sword leaps so often from its scabbard, and is so quickly resheathed, that one day I mistook it for the needle it so much resembles in size, and petitioned for the pattern of the embroidery!”

Here the newly-arrived domino shrugged his shoulders, with evident signs of impatience, and whispered something in the speaker’s ear, which elicited a most scornful laugh.

“Now, on my word,” continued Folly, “that were high treason, not to be said aloud; a speech, noble minstrel, so undeniably absurd, so exquisitely foolish, that Folly’s self might have envied every word.”

The vivacity of the mask attracted the notice of a passing company; one of whom, raising his eyes to Clifford’s headgear, asked, laughingly, what his badge denoted.

“A zealous Jacobite,” replied his companion.

“Nay, rather one who knows how to bear their withered fortunes,” said another.

“*Je vous le dirai!*” exclaimed a third.

*“C'est une fleur blanche dont le souvenir au moins, ne fane pas !”*

William raised his head eagerly, but the human scene was already shifted ; while his anxiety had not escaped the notice of Folly, who exclaimed,

“ Well pointed ! that had more effect than any random shots of mine.”

“ And yet,” observed William, “ the Baronne de Bernay could scarcely be suspected of missing her aim, whether directed against the head or the heart of any man.”

“ You know me, then !” exclaimed Mirabel, unmasking. “ I trusted too much to your inexperience in these matters ; for, believe me, I am an adept in disguise ; but give me your arm, Pierre Vidal, or Robert Wace, or whatever else you would be called. And now that you are tired of folly, listen to reason ; but not here, let us walk in the garden, which is cool and refreshing after this stifling corridor.”

They entered the room which was untenanted, and, seating themselves upon a rustic bench, Mirabel thus began :

“ It may appear abrupt and ill-timed if, after

so much jesting, I suddenly speak on a serious and important concern, but this is an opportunity which must not be lost. Your manner towards me, Mr. Clifford, is so distant and cautious, that I have sometimes reason to suspect the regent, of having poisoned your mind, by representing me as politic and heartless as himself; but this shall not deter me from acting the part of a friend, and I only request, for your own sake, that you will consider me in that light. You are young, perhaps unused to courts, at least to the court of Paris, and, God be praised, there are few others like it. Despite the regent's courtesy he regards you with a jealous eye; I do not mean to tell you that he is an hypocrite, for hypocrisy was one of the only vices that nature denied at his birth; but, since your first interview, he has received information which leads him to consider you as a dangerous personage. Mark my words; all your movements are watched, your proceedings known, your associates, nay, your conversation reported!"

"You indeed surprise me," said William. "I know not what information his highness

could have received that is any way connected with me."

"Nay," replied the baronne, "you do not repay my candour; but I forgive you for classing Mirabel de Bernay with the rest of the world. Yet you must be aware that your friendship with an acknowledged partisan of the Stuarts would in itself expose you to suspicion, now that considerations of policy have separated their interests from those of France."

"If that were all," rejoined William, not a little relieved; "and if, as you say, I am so narrowly watched, one conversation between the person in question and myself would suffice to remove every shade of suspicion."

"But that is not all," insisted Mirabel; "the suspicions relate to some circumstances connected with Bordeaux. But hush! hush! some one approaches, and that domino examines us so minutely, he must have an errand to one or the other."

As she spoke, a tall figure, dressed in a long and ample domino (which completely shrouded his form), with one knot of scarlet ribbon on the hood, advanced; he walked round and

round the garden and then stopped, as if desirous of being observed.

William felt, he knew not why, that the mask was an object of interest to him, and he followed every movement with his eyes. Mirabel, who believed he might be an important messenger, rose, and standing by the fountain, dipped her hand playfully in the water; thus affording the domino an opportunity of speaking to either herself or William. The figure walked hurriedly up to the latter, and whispered in his ear: "Tell Gaston he lives in Albert's heart;" then, without awaiting an answer, disappeared.

William's heart beat, while the hope that crossed his mind was in itself a joy. He forgot the presence of his companion—he forgot all but the possibility of that hope being realized; and, rising from his seat, he followed the mask hastily.

Mirabel de Bernay turned and found herself alone, abandoned by that man in whose safety she had taken the deepest interest—the only man for whom her heart had ever beat!

It was a first bitter lesson of disappointment. A thousand new and galling emotions rushed upon her mind; her proud heart swelled be-

neath a sense of degradation, and the few tears that trickled down her flushed cheeks were still scalding as they fell upon her beautiful bosom. She dashed them away, stamping her small foot with a violence of which it appeared incapable, while, as if to crown the distress of her situation, the regent put his head into the room.

He was by her side in a moment. "How," he cried, with an insolence of manner that was not unusual to him, "my dainty Folly, hast thou so soon disgusted yon handsome troubadour by thy strange caprices?"

Mirabel did not deign the duke an answer; but, looking at him as if she expected he must wither under the power of her eye, suddenly extricated herself from his rude grasp, and darted out of the room before he could detain her.

As for William, he had no trouble in finding the mysterious mask, who was lingering in the hope of being followed. No sooner did Clifford appear, with a countenance expressive of anxiety, than the domino made a sign to him to be silent; while, taking his arm hastily, he mixed (to William's surprise) in the thickest part of the crowd, where they walked up and down for some time

without speaking. But this proved only a blind, for he soon after verged off in another direction, and, choosing the first room that was vacant, he halted, and let go his hold of William's arm.

“For God's sake,” exclaimed Clifford, who could not restrain his impatience, “keep me in suspense no longer! Tell me who and what you are, and how you became acquainted with the words you just now uttered.”

He scanned the stranger from head to foot, and for a few moments his excited hope wound itself up into the belief that Dumont stood before him.

“I fancied those words would make me known to you in a moment,” replied the mask, in a voice that destroyed William's fabric of unwarrantable expectations in a moment.

Hope, suddenly excited, is often so overweening in her expectations that William, who had so long and so earnestly wished for a meeting with the Duke de P——, now experienced disappointment, because he had chosen to believe that Dumont, the state prisoner, could be within the walls of the Palais Royale. A moment's reflection, however, made him grateful for this opportunity, and he therefore continued: “I

know you now, monseigneur, though I despaired of ever seeing you again ; but, since we have met, let me entreat you to give me some information on a subject of mutual interest."

"Your arrival has long been known to me," replied the duke ; "but I go little into society, and a visit to your house might compromise both of us. Paris is peopled with spies, and I, at least, am marked ! How much longer do you remain in this city ?"

"I know not," said William, impatiently ; "all depends upon my success. It rests with you to tell me where he is, and how I can see him. I do not ask for warnings or advice. Nothing shall deter me from the attempt, which has hitherto been delayed only because I was perfectly ignorant of the place of his concealment."

"We are observed," said the duke, "bending forward, and speaking as if he believed the wax tapers were spies of the government ; "take my arm : let us walk together for a short time, and then separate : any abruptness will attract notice."

"You think meanly of me," he said, as they entered the corridor : "were you as familiar



with captivity as myself, you would perhaps believe, that the man who never shunned danger in battle, may shrink at the bare mention of captivity. I would rather ascend the scaffold" (he added firmly) "than enter the Bastille!"

"I can believe it," rejoined William; "but we part not thus. Name any hour, any spot, where we may meet. You must not, you cannot refuse me; although I have not leisure to urge the matter fully, believe me when I assert, that I have the weightiest motives for desiring an interview with Dumont, both on his account and my own."

"Your eagerness will be remarked," said the duke; "contrive to meet me to-morrow, on the road to Meudon, on the steps of the large stone cross of St. Etienne, about three o'clock in the afternoon; I will then tell you *where*, and *how*, if you still persist in your rash undertaking. Now let go my arm quietly; I cannot help fancying that tall domino has been following us for some time."

"And if he have," said William fearlessly, "our conversation was in so low a tone, that I myself found it difficult to hear a word: and surely in this scene of liberty, two masks may

bear each other company for one quarter of an hour. Well, I am going; *au revoir*, ‘*Nœud Rouge!*’ ”

With a lightened heart, William threaded his way through the crowd towards the principal staircase, when his conscience suddenly smote him for want of courtesy towards Mirabel. He had left her perfectly alone, in an abrupt and rude manner; and that, too, at the moment she was warning him of danger. He could not, it was true, explain how strong had been the temptation, nor could he confess his intention of disregarding her advice: still he could own his fault, and entreat her pardon for such a breach of gallantry, and with this purpose he sought her every where.

His search, however, proved fruitless: Folly had disappeared (though her influence was at its meridian), and in no other disguise could William detect the fairy form of the baronne. He regretted the circumstance, but his mind was set upon other things, and the morrow's appointment engrossed his thoughts.

The sudden appearance of the duke; their short, but interesting discourse, and speedy parting, had all occupied so brief a space of

time, that William felt bewildered. What hour did the duke say? he asked of himself; but receiving no satisfactory answer, he continued, "Fool that I am, to have forgotten that. I know not where he lives, and dare not inquire; as to meeting him again in this crowd, that is perfectly hopeless." But, lo! as he thus thought, he turned, and to his unspeakable satisfaction, perceived the well-known "Nœud Rouge" a few yards in the rear.

"Pardon my forgetfulness," whispered Clifford; "must I be at the Croix de St. Etienne at three or four to-morrow evening?"

The mask pointed to the number of the people who surrounded them; then raising his hand cautiously, placed four fingers upon Clifford's arm, and was rapidly lost in the crowd, while William returned home full of hope and expectation.

CHAPTER XVI.

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THE clock of a neighbouring church had just tolled four. The sun, who had been sparing of his rays during the course of the day, now shot forth a few brilliant gleams, as he sank beneath the horizon, like the dying miser, who would fain obliterate the recollection of past avarice by some splendid deed of charity upon his deathbed; and a single horseman, enveloped in a military cloak and large hat, à la Louis Quatorze, turned the corner of one of the small avenues which led into the carrefour of St. Etienne, at that period one of the most unfrequented spots in the immediate vicinity of Paris. He reined in his horse, whose hoofs clattered loudly on the pavement, and raising himself in the stirrups, looked anxiously in the direction of the stone cross.

William Clifford, for he it was, was not a little disconcerted, in discovering by one glance, that the only person who sat upon the steps was not the duke; nor was he any way consoled, by perceiving that the black hood and flowing robes were those of a female kneeling, as if in prayer. Still he advanced, surmising that it might prove some faithful emissary, whom that cautious nobleman had intrusted with an errand in which he feared to show himself; and indeed, upon reflection, William approved the policy by which the duke had been actuated. The woman's presence would give a false colouring to the affair, and such meetings were then too frequent to excite either curiosity or suspicion. William therefore passed slowly before the cross; and as he did so, he lifted his hat, and saluted the mysterious figure.

"You are somewhat tardy!" she said, in a low and cautious tone; "the duke named three o'clock for the rendezvous."

"No," replied William, leaping from his horse, and fastening the bridle to an iron ring on the opposite side of the cross; "No! by this token, that he laid his four fingers on my right arm, with so friendly a pressure, that I believe

the marks are there now to vouch for my truth and punctuality."

Here he kneeled by the side of the unknown, expecting her to begin the conversation; but as she remained silent, he inquired where the nobleman, whom she had first mentioned, now was.

"On his road to the Bastille!" cried Mirabel de Bernay, throwing back the hood, and displaying to her astonished companion a countenance beaming with all the fierce animation of gratified revenge; "on his road to the Bastille, where one word from my lips will send you to bear him company!"

William stood as if thunderstruck; and it was several moments before his astonishment could form itself into words. "How you have possessed yourself of my secret, madam," he exclaimed at last, "and for what purpose you exercise such unprovoked cruelty, I am at a loss to imagine."

"Indeed!" rejoined Mirabel, "indeed! are you so innocent?—did you then believe me so contemptible as to pass over in humble patience the unmanly insult that you offered me last night—did you suppose, because I stooped

to evince my preference for one whom I now detest—did you, I ask, suppose that Mirabel de Bernay was to be insulted with impunity—treated like a handmaid—left alone—alone, in the centre of a court, where hundreds would have gloried in her lightest look—at the moment too when she was endangering her own safety by providing for yours?—Holy Virgin! The recollection is madness! But I am revenged: the snare was set, and the victim fell an easy prey. I caused you, sir, to be followed by one, who in dress and stature resembled him for whom I was abandoned. He played his part bravely: the duke stood on this spot one hour ago, and instead of the eager and confiding Clifford, he found some more punctual ministers of justice, who even now conduct him on the road that traitors do not love.”

Mirabel paused, for she was breathless, and then added, in a tone of bitter raillery, “He bade me greet you well: he goes to answer *the question*, before it be put to you.”

William heard her in silence, and at first, a faint and scornful smile appeared to intimate that he doubted the truth of her narrative; but the unhesitating tone, and the precision with

which she related the facts, soon convinced him of her sincerity.

It required all the noble generosity of William's nature to suppress even in a degree, the indignation that swelled within him. Ere he replied, he gazed at Mirabel from head to foot, as if to remind him that the consideration of her weakness should ever soften the wrath of man towards woman, even when her conduct provokes him to forget that she is aught but an enemy.

"If, madam," he replied at length, in a cold, stern tone, "you thus pervert the power of which you boast, how can you hope for the esteem of your own sex, or the respect of ours? You have made use of a vile stratagem to procure the downfall of a man who never injured you, and you have taken an ungenerous advantage of my incapacity to chastise the author of so hateful an action. Had a man acted as you have done this day, his conduct had not been half so base, for at least he must have abided the consequences, from which you are well aware that the privileges of your sex effectually shield you."

He bent his eye so sternly on Mirabel, that



her own fell beneath it; and yet she answered,

“Do you speak to me thus? to me who have your life in my hands; who possess power of which you little dream, and at whose desire the portals of the Bastille will open as readily as the gates of my own chateau? One word from these lips; one signal—ay, at this very moment—and, vain man, you are immured for life within those wretched walls—ay,—perhaps torn and mangled on the wheel! Do you not fear me now?” she cried, once more lifting her flashing eyes upon him.

“I will not deny it,” replied William, with all the bitterness of scorn; “for the lion may fear the viper, whose venom he despises, even while smarting from the ignoble wound!”

The just anger which the baronne’s conduct had excited, invested Clifford’s form and features with more than usual dignity; and as he stood before her with his arms folded on his breast, as if in defiance of her menaces, Mirabel’s countenance bespoke but too plainly that there was a struggle within. The vengeful fierceness that had at first appeared there gradually fled, and over her speaking features came

every various shade of impassioned grief. The eagle eye of William Clifford was still fixed in one cold and reproachful glance upon her. It subdued her utterly! but she read in it less scorn than grief. She pressed her hands against her forehead: she tore her long black hair; and clasping her hands, exclaimed with bitter tears, "O, pardon me, pity me, humbled, wretched creature that I am!—I hoped that revenge would bring some consolation to a heart that is worked almost to frenzy! You are safe," she continued; "safe as the blessed saints when they descend on earth, and walk among the sons of men. It was but idle boasting of my power, for may the holy Virgin be my witness, that Mirabel would rather die than cause one hair of your head to fall! Oh, yes—yes, I spoke of prison and of torture; but would rather endure them both myself! I see you hate me—and I dare to tell you that I love you—love you with a passion—a madness—of which no other woman is capable! I who have never loved before!—I who never believed in the existence of one human being, that could excite such feelings in my breast—I who have laughed and mocked the wretchedness of

others! The years that I have passed at court have been one uninterrupted course of admiration and success; and now the first and only object of a passion, which I dare call as pure as it is strong, shuns, abandons, and slights me! In that dreadful moment when you proved that my words, even when treating of your own safety, were all empty and indifferent to you: when I found myself alone—exposed to the insults of the detested Philip of Orleans—oh, then the blood of my mother's ancestry rose within me, and I vowed, that as you would not love, you should have cause to hate me. I vainly hoped that love became extinct, when revenge took possession of my heart. — You turn from me," she said, laying her hand upon Clifford's arm; "the duke—"

"Do not," replied William, sharply, shaking off her hand as if it had been some noxious reptile, as the mention of the duke's name re-awakened the indignation which had been somewhat pacified by the sight of her grief; "do not lower yourself any further in my esteem by such an unnecessary humiliation. Madam, the heart of him you speak to, in life and death, is devoted to another. You say that

your love is pure as it is strong; might I suggest—”

She suffered him not to conclude. Her cheeks, which shame had dyed with its deepest crimson, now became suddenly and fearfully white: the blood forsook her very lips, and she grasped the pedestal of the cross for support. “Do not say so!” she exclaimed, with a composure that appeared frightful when contrasted with the emotion she had before displayed; “do not say you love another.”

“And why should I not say so?” demanded Clifford, stimulated by the remembrance of Blanch; “and why are you not rather grateful for one more opportunity of revenge? My death, or even my imprisonment, would bring down misery, on two attached hearts. Surely that were a triumph worthy your determined nature; and why should I not glory in my love for one, whose gentle and retiring modesty needed no contrast to enhance its value?”

“Spare me, for the love of heaven!” cried Mirabel, “for my reason will not bear it longer;” and as she spoke, she clasped her hands together, uttered a faint cry, and fell senseless at his feet.

William was now alarmed; he looked round, but there was not a human being in sight; but he perceived an Abreuvoir at the corner of the alley, and unknotting his sash, plunged it into the water. Returning hastily, he stooped down, and placing Mirabel's head upon his knee, bathed her forehead, and chafed her stone-cold hands between his own, with all the care and tenderness of a brother. He now blamed himself for having used harsh and unfeeling words, although the reflection of the duke, whose despair he well knew would be unbounded, still mingled a large share of resentment with the compassion which the sight of the unhappy Mirabel excited as she lay so still and deathlike before him, that William could hardly persuade himself she lived. He bent earnestly over her face, and listened with painful anxiety for her breathing. It came at last, short and convulsive; by degrees she opened her eyes languidly, but as they met his she closed them again, while the returning blood slightly tinged her cheek.

“Are you recovering?” inquired William, watching with sincere commiseration the struggles of reviving nature. The convulsive

heaving of her bosom was evident through its covering, while her features were frequently, though slightly, contracted.

“You are better now,” he continued, in the tone of a parent addressing a suffering child; “can you not speak to me?”

Mirabel once more opened her eyes; she raised her head with difficulty, and pushing back the hair which fell over her face, supported herself with one hand, so as to sit nearly upright. She looked timidly at William, and for a moment something like a smile played round her mouth.

“I am happy now,” she said; “this moment repays me for all; may you be blest for that one kind look, for those few kind words! They will remain deeply engraven on my heart.”

“You have suffered much, I fear!” exclaimed Clifford, forgetting every other feeling in compassion and interest.

“Yes,” she replied, pressing her hand upon her brow. “I suffer now, but do not regret it; the moment in which I awoke, and saw you bending so kindly over me, was the most blessed of my life. Nay, do not frown again! It only showed that you pitied me. I ask no

more!" she added, hurriedly, "I ask no more! but I think I could die to see that look again."

"The damps of night are falling," said Clifford, "let me entreat you to throw my cloak around you, and let me conduct you home; you are ill, and this cold night may be fatal."

"Thank you," she replied, at the same time throwing on her hood, "I will go, but you must not accompany me. My coach is waiting not far off, and I must find it alone. I have much to thank you for, sir," she added, "and a little to forgive:—I thank you for that too, for it leaves me not so entirely wrong." She then rose and strove to walk, but found herself unable to do so without the assistance of her companion.

"Wrap yourself in your cloak," she said, "and draw your hat over your face, and, for my sake, let me entreat you not to utter one word in the hearing of my servants."

Clifford obeyed, and as they traversed the place slowly, Mirabel once more addressed him, though in a different tone from that which she had just been using.

"By all you hold dear in this world and the

next, do not refuse my prayer," she said: "come to my house to-morrow, in the forenoon. I will see you before my duty calls me to the palace."

"I too have a request to make," replied Clifford; "The duke's instant release!"

"He shall sleep in his own palace this very night," she answered.

As Mirabel spoke, they turned into the alley, where her coach was waiting, immediately under the lamp of the church; she raised her voice as high as she could, desiring the coachman to come to the spot where she stood, which was in shade; and Clifford supported her into the carriage.

"*Au revoir*, M. le Marquis," she cried aloud, "the Duchess of Orleans shall be informed of the prompt execution of her wishes; and her royal highness will, I have no doubt, thank you in person."

The coach drove on, and as William turned away, he heard a horse trotting down the alley, so as inevitably to meet the carriage. He would not look back, however, but only quickened his pace, and returned to the cross of St. Etienne.

After looking, during an instant, for his scarf,



which he could not find, he mounted his steed hastily, but had not proceeded far upon the Paris road, when he found himself followed, or rather pursued. He slackened his pace, the other horseman did the same; he galloped, and his example was imitated. At length, enraged by such a proceeding, he checked his horse suddenly, and found himself riding abreast with the stranger.

“Who is it,” he demanded, “that has the insolence to track my steps in this manner?”

“My dear Clifford!” exclaimed Roland Stanley, “somehow or other I always contrive to recognise you; and in this instance I trusted to your somewhat warm temperament to inquire into my pursuit, and now I trust to your friendship to pardon my little scheme for escaping a solitary ride home.”

“I do not consider it an act of friendship, sir,” replied Clifford, “to play the spy upon all my actions, and intrude at all times upon my solitude.”

“Nay, Clifford,” said his companion, putting spurs to his horse, “if you are determined to quarrel with me, I will fly the danger that I do not blush to fear: but old friends and new

loves do not well agree together, and to some dispositions novelty must ever be a recommendation."

He spoke with more acrimony than William had believed him capable of, and galloped forward, leaving his countryman to digest his words at leisure.

CHAPTER XVII.

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WE would now pass at once to the morning subsequent to the incidents just related, and introduce the reader into the boudoir of a hotel in the vicinity of the palace, having an especial reason for taking a hasty survey of the same. Our reason is, that there almost invariably exists some analogy between the character of a room and that of its habitual inmate, and we always feel better acquainted with the one when we have seen the other.

The general appearance and colouring of the apartment in question was subdued; it was hung with velvet draperies, of a deep dull crimson, and wainscoted with black oak. The casements, the furniture, and the ornaments, were all pure Gothic, a style which was at

variance with the more gorgeous taste of that day. A few pictures relieved the sombre hue of the walls; a glowing Titian, a delicate Correggio, with several fine portraits of distinguished characters, and two from the pencil of modern artists, one of which was a small full length of a lady in a Spanish costume, but the other, which was the size of life, occupied the principal place on the walls, and was a painting of great merit. It represented a youth of remarkable beauty, whose resemblance to the baronne was most striking, and led many to believe the portrait hers, while the hasty in judgment often availed themselves of this opportunity to animadvert upon Mirabel's bold vanity in assuming a disguise that was becoming only in one acceptance of the word.

The most remarkable point, however, in the arrangement of the apartment was that attention to the harmony of trifles which it displayed, and which is often forgotten in the magnificence of greater objects: the locks, the hinges of the doors, the loops which confined the curtains, and the curiously-wrought fire-dogs were all in themselves worthy of notice.

These minor beauties, though often escaping

notice, added imperceptibly to the general effect, which was calm, subdued, and harmonious. Suffice it to say, it was a spot to think, nay, to dream in. There was an air of perpetual twilight that seemed fraught with poetry, and accorded more with the actual than the usual appearance of its possessor.

Mirabel de Bernay was seated exactly opposite, though at some distance from the window, so that the light fell immediately on her face. The unusual paleness, the heavy eye and drooping lid, plainly told that the past night had been a vigil of sorrow. At her feet slumbered a large greyhound, who was frequently roused by his lady's starting from her revery, as often as the wheels of a carriage or the hoofs of a horse sounded along the street. At last, however, without any such preliminary, the folding doors were thrown open, and William Clifford entered. There was gravity even to sternness in his deportment as he advanced, and greeting Mirabel with the profoundest respect, took the seat to which she motioned him. He did not speak, but there was a loftiness in his manner, combined with an expression of pity on his countenance, which made his visit resemble that of a merciful

judge. Nor did the baronne's appearance destroy the similarity. On his entrance the blood rushed into her cheeks with the same rapidity and violence as on the preceding evening, and as quickly disappeared, leaving her paler than before. There was hesitation, and an embarrassment in her manner, that was the more distressing from its novelty, and her first attempts to speak were unsuccessful. Her voice trembled as she at length began, while her eyes were fixed on the dog, who, having been rebuked for growling at the stranger, was now making his peace with his mistress.

"This is very kind," she said; "I began to fear you would not come, and I am most anxious to inform you that the duke is at liberty. He is also aware that his release, and not his imprisonment, is owing to your interference, and though he declines any further communication, I am empowered to assure you of his good wishes and esteem."

"But, madam," replied William, "are you aware that this distressing circumstance deprives me of a long-cherished hope on which may depend the happiness or misery of my future life?"

Mirabel looked as if she would deprecate his reproaches. "I will endeavour to persuade him to see you again," she said, "but fear it will be in vain."

William bowed, and there was a pause that appeared centuries to Mirabel. She raised her eyes languidly, and gazed on her companion, with an expression that appealed to all the kindly feelings of his soul.

"Do not," she exclaimed, "maintain that cruel silence any longer! The bitter words of anger and reproof which you addressed to me yesterday, were not so terrible as this frigid ceremony. If you could read my thoughts; if you could see how changed I am—how bruised and broken in spirit—you would not bend your eye so sternly on me. You can never know the deep anguish of being despised. I am less blameable than I seem; but, alas! I feel that every word I utter is liable to misconception! Let me entreat you to tell me, if I speak in vain; if my words pass for nothing; or worse than that, if you believe them dictated by unworthy motives."

"On the contrary," replied William, "since

we first became acquainted, I have always admired and done justice to your candour."

A smile that had something very bitter in its expression, appeared upon the baronne's countenance, as she continued: "Of my candour indeed, *you have had* no insignificant proof. Unwooed I have loved; unasked I have confessed that love: my sorrow is only equalled by my shame; yet, except in one instance, for which instant reparation was made, surely I have erred more against myself than you. But extenuation is not my object. I fear lest my speaking weary you, and dare not proceed while you afford me so little encouragement."

"I have before assured you, madam," replied William, "that your words have all due weight with me. I am sensible of having been betrayed into unbecoming violence, both of language and manner; but my temper is hasty, and the provocation was not slight. Let me entreat you to proceed, and be assured that I listen with attention and interest."

"I was about," said the baronne, encouraged by the mildness of his tone, "to give you some account of my early life and education, trusting



that it might form some excuse in your eyes for the conduct of one, whose childhood and youth were equally neglected.

“ My father, who was an eminent soldier, served with the army in Spain, and on his return from that country, was accompanied by a young bride, the daughter of a Castilian noble, who was said to have cursed his child for marrying a foreigner, and an enemy. Some time after their establishment in France, the baronne gave birth to twins, and in the same year her husband died. She was a kind and indulgent, but injudicious mother: she loved my brother and myself, but treated us as if we were always to remain children, and forgot that a store of future misery was laid up with every caprice she humoured. Inconsolable for the loss of her husband, and continually haunted by the remembrance of her father’s curse, she had not the energy to thwart or to correct us. We grew up in consequence self-willed and passionate, and by the time we were ten years old completely governed my poor mother. Yet her death was a blow to our young hearts, and well can I remember the first pang of grief I ever experienced, when they refused to let me enter

the chamber of death, and told me I should never see my mother again.

“We lived together, my brother and I, at our old chateau, with no one to control our childish proceedings. We treated our servants with haughtiness, but to each other we were ever kind and gentle. From morning till night we were together, hand in hand, and side by side, totally uneducated, except by our own taste for reading, which led us to devour the contents of the old library. We were inseparable in thought and deed. Our greatest delight was in riding all over the beautiful country which surrounds the chateau: Gaspard, who was an expert horseman himself, purchased a beautiful jennet for my use ; and he loved to instruct me in the management of the noble little animal, while I, on my part, experienced much pride in conquering my fears to gain his praise, and would often declare I was as fearless as himself, when my heart quaked within me.

“Thus passed, or rather flew, six years of pure and peaceful happiness. The love of angels cannot be more beautiful than that of a brother and a sister. To hear my own feelings clothed in nobler language, my own opinions

exalted by manly reasoning; to find a superior self in Gaspard, and glory in *his* superiority: to know that I could fly to him for that assistance and counsel he gave so well; for that comfort he loved to bestow—how sweet it was! O, God! thou who knowest all things, why was he torn from me? He whose simplest word had power to sooth and tranquillize my passions, and whose nobler example was the only guide I ever had to lead me on the path of virtue!—My enthusiasm wearies you: I will not trespass much longer upon your patience.—We were separated: he, by the direction of relations who sadly neglected us, went to college, and then entered the army under the auspices of Marshal Villars. The year that brought peace to France by the treaty of Rastadt, brought death to my heart. Gaspard de Bernay, whose ardent bravery exposed him to every danger, was slain in his second battle, before he had acquired that glory he so richly deserved. Mortally wounded, he was carried off the field by a brother officer, who brought me the sad tidings. ‘His latest thoughts,’ said that kind hearted young man, who soon after experienced a similar fate, ‘his latest words were of his sister. Faint with loss of blood, he vainly en-

deavoured to unbuckle his sword ; and when I assisted him to do so,—Carry that to Mirabel, he said, and tell her that Gaspard fondly hoped he might have lived to give his country cause to mourn a death, that will now only wring her solitary heart. Tell her I did my duty, and bid her hang those laurels on my tomb, which her hands had fondly woven for my brow.’

“Forgive me,” added Mirabel, as she raised her eyes to the picture we have before described ; “these recollections, which are seldom called up in words, and that speaking resemblance, renew all my sorrow for the untimely death of Gaspard !” Her eyes filled with tears, and William, touched by her grief, extended his hand, and endeavoured to console her.

“I passed one year, I may almost say of madness, at my chateau, and refused to see or speak with a human being. I caused every thing that had belonged to Gaspard to be placed in my own apartment : I would sit for hours, without speaking, looking at his picture, with his sword lying on my knees. Then suddenly I would address him by name, and call upon him to comfort me. Nay,” continued Mirabel, crossing herself as she spoke, “I even presumed to arraign that justice which had torn him from me.

Daily I visited his horse (that was never to bear another), but the dog you now see, his favourite Sable, has ever since been my constant companion: he would lie and whine at his master's door, till I knelt by his side, and bathed the poor animal with my tears, for our grief was in common. The neighbourhood believed me mad, and well might they do so.

“I was sitting one day as usual in my own apartment, when one of my servants announced the Duchess Dowager of Orleans. I forbade him to admit her, but in vain. She was accompanied by the regent (the late king had been dead several months), and although I was too much incensed at the intrusion to receive them with proper respect, the duchess's kind and soothing manner found its way to my heart. If they had heard the report of my insanity, there was nothing in my appearance to lead them to disbelieve it. The apartment was hung with black; I myself was dressed in the deepest mourning, with much that was perhaps strange and fantastic in my apparel; and grief and solitude gave wildness to my language and manner.

“The regent spoke kindly and cheerfully: he

had come, he said, in his capacity of guardian, to carry me away from my seclusion : his wife had retained a vacancy among her maids of honour, in the hope that the *Baronne de Bernay* would accept it. ‘Your family,’ he said, ‘have always testified their attachment to the house of Valois : your father bled, and your brother died, in its service, and now we would do our best to attach the lovely representative of so loyal a race to our cause.’

“Here he spoke of *Gaspard* in a manner that made my heart expand with pride. They worked upon my feelings—I should rather say upon my weakness : they wrung from me a promise of consent, and a few months afterwards I left my chateau, and found myself suddenly in the vortex of a dissipated court. My highest excitement had hitherto been, a longer ride than usual, a more interesting romance, or a word of praise from *Gaspard’s* lips. My knowledge of mankind was founded on those chronicles of chivalry which we had devoured together : in my belief there were but two classes of men ; two descriptions of women—the loyal knight, and the cruel tyrant ; the peerless damsel, and the degraded sinner. I never dreamed of all those shades between vice and virtue ;

those links which connect the golden with the baser metal. I could not picture to myself that one of my own sex would extol the beauty and talent to me, which she disparaged to another ; or that a wife and a mother could pour pernicious counsels in my young and inexperienced ear. I never dreamed of men who would echo my sentiments, and lead me on to that confidence they purposed to abuse : who would speak of honour and virtue as deities they worshipped, and watch every change of countenance to regulate their words with the subtlety of demons ; or like the cruel conquerors of the new world, study the language of the country, merely to facilitate its capture.

“ But, even from the grave, the spirit of my brother seemed to protect me. He had for so long been my standard of manly excellence, that I could feel no sympathy with those who bore him no resemblance ; and I was continually asking myself if Gaspard would have considered this or that man worthy of his friendship, or his sister’s love. In fact, though I thought well of all, I met no one towards whom I could feel with that ardour which was to me the only proof of loving. At first I thought well of all, but my eyes were soon opened ; I found

hypocrisy where I had looked for virtue; depravity where I expected candour; envy and malice where I was promised friendship. I learned to hate, to despise, to condemn! and oh, above all, to doubt! Unable to pursue the tastes that were natural, the occupations that were genial to me, I became what I am—what I was two days ago. That torrent of feeling within, its natural course once impeded, flowed in a wrong direction. Inspired by scorn and detestation, I loved to excite the passion that I did not share, and the envy I had never felt, among the men who would have deceived, and the women who would have betrayed me. From the moment of our first meeting, I had been marked out for the regent's pursuit; and vanity now urges him to follow up a suit that he knows to be hopeless. In the midst of this world of Paris, I am alone, solitary, and desolate!"

Mirabel covered her face with both her hands, but the tears she wished to conceal escaped through her fingers.

"And that solitude," replied William, whose attention had been rivetted by his companion's sad tale, "should be a matter of rejoicing to you, it should be your greatest boast."



“ Perhaps so !” she replied. “ But the baneful atmosphere of such scenes should never be breathed by a young and pure-minded woman, lest her eye and ear imbibe the poison which, sooner or later, may infect her mind. Alas ! how often is the burst of virtuous indignation silenced by the sneers of ridicule ; how frequently are the scruples of conscience carried away by the overwhelming tide of example !

“ But do you not believe,” he inquired earnestly, “ that if some of the young and lovely of the French aristocracy, strong in the support of a conscience still free from contamination ; if they, I say, were to stand forward in all the beauty of unassuming virtue, proving not only by their conduct, but by every look and every word, how widely they differed from the world around them, do you not believe that they would gain many proselytes, and in the end give a new tone to the society which they adorn ? Why do your sex, even the well-inclined portion, so lightly esteem the social influence they possess ? why are they so assiduous to shun the imputation of excellence ? I have always loved to consider woman as placed by nature in possession of quiet but extensive power. She is not called upon to

exercise her faculties in public activity, but in the calmer sphere of private life her sway is, or ought to be, most potent. I have more than once seen a professed infidel put to silence by a few words of mild reproof from female lips; but alas on the other hand, I have heard language held, and opinions supported in the presence of even virtuous women, who appeared by silence to acquiesce in sentiments they in reality detested, merely from some despicable scruple or weak timidity. Let not woman, by a harsh and premature judgment, be ever ready to condemn or even suspect our motives, but let her, with that gentleness which is one of her loveliest attractions, discountenance evil with humility and approve virtue with candour; and, above all, let her never, for some pitiful gratification of vanity, sport with those feelings which she ought to compassionate and regret, even while she improves and checks them."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mirabel, whose tears now fell fast, "I thank you for those words! They are the best proof of your pardon; you would never have cast them away on one whom you believed incapable of understanding and appreciating, dare I say of following, them? But you

shall judge of their effect ; you shall have reason to confess I am not so unworthy as I appeared—oh ! no—not so unworthy as my rash conduct might have led you to suppose.”

Her eyes fell ; but raising them again with an expression of modest pride, as if strong in the knowledge of her own rectitude, she added, “ Surrounded, as I before told you, by those whose pursuit was not cooled either by the neglect or arrogance with which I repaid their passion, can you blame me for believing that one, unto whom I could give my whole heart, might learn to love me ? Alas ! how fondly I was led to imagine that I had at length found the man whom Gaspard would have gloried in calling brother. How rashly did I dream of the time when I might return to the home of my childhood with him, whose title was more sweet, more sacred, than that of parent or brother ! Do not misunderstand me,” she continued abruptly, “ I seek nothing ! I hope nothing ! It is a dream passed away ! It was ordained otherwise, and now my fondest wish is that the time will come, when I may justify my title to be your friend. May I ?” she said, bending earnestly towards him ; “ will you give me that hope ? I deny not, from the moment we met,

I loved, though I did not know it then; but even she, who could love unsought, shall learn to chasten and subdue her love. Will you believe me, will you trust me? My earnest wish and endeavour shall now be to watch over your safety, and to preserve you to that happy being who may deserve you better, but cannot love you more, than I do!"

Clifford was deeply moved. "What sorrow," he cried, "have I brought upon you, what misery have I added to your lot!"

"True," she replied, "you have rendered this world a desert, and mankind more hateful than before, but I would rather," she cried earnestly, "I would rather have it so than part from one painful, but cherished memory."

"I grieve that it should be so," said Clifford; "but in return for all your unmerited regard and kindness I can but say, that I am deeply grateful."

"Do more!" replied Mirabel. "Confide in me; show me the means of serving you, and I will do it at the risk of life or fortune. But we must part," she added, "for my duty calls me to the palace, and I have another garb and another countenance to assume. From my demeanour they shall never discover the

secret that is known to us alone; and you, William Clifford—you will save me from their taunts and mockery. You will not let the Comte de Salins triumph, or the Duke of Orleans revel in my grief?"

"You cannot fear it," said Clifford, rising to withdraw; "you cannot, I am sure, believe me so base."

She extended her hand, which he raised respectfully to his lips, and left the room.

Within an hour Mirabel de Bernay stood by the side of her royal mistress, whose *levée* was unusually crowded. Never had the baronne's vivacity excited more admiration; never had the brilliancy of her wit attracted such universal attention. The outward victory was complete, her manner might have deceived William Clifford, nay, for the moment, it almost deceived herself. It is this species of courage, if we may so term it, that belongs more especially to the weaker sex.

The warrior, whose education has inured and whose inclinations have led him to a life of danger, may issue his commands with composure while the bullet is corroding the flesh, or amputation torturing the limb; but to stand

before the world, with a smile on the lips and a jest on the tongue, when the heart is sick and the hopes blighted, oh, that is the lot of woman! Then let joy be manifest, then let satisfaction appear, then let the eye gleam brighter and the mouth be wreathed with smiles. No one must know her sorrow, for that sorrow is degradation; no one must guess the inward conflict, lest derision and ridicule pollute the sanctuary of her heart, and laugh its most sacred feelings to scorn. Oh, God! must those sweet sympathies which thou hast implanted in our nature be exposed to the mockery of thy creatures, or only revered in proportion to their success?

END OF VOL. I.

THE  
STATE PRISONER

A TALE

OF

THE FRENCH REGENCY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON  
SAUNDERS AND OTLEY, CONDUIT STREET.  
1837.

WHITING, BEAUFORT HOUSE, STRAND.



THE  
STATE PRISONER.

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CHAPTER I.

FROM the day of William Clifford's interview with the baronne at her hotel, his feelings, with regard to her, were materially changed. From that time she became an object rather of compassion and interest than of disapprobation and dislike. Of dislike? oh no! It was not in his nature to feel aught but kindness and tenderness towards those who, in distress and grief, allowed him to share in their sorrow. Under other circumstances, indeed, the sensations of deep interest thus excited might have ripened into warmer emotions, but his heart was guarded by love of too fixed, too firm a nature, ever to suffer one thought to stray. He strove to consider the baronne as his sister, and hoped to replace the brother whom she mourned, by

soothing her grief and regulating the impetuosity of her nature. On her part, Mirabel listened to him as to an inspired oracle; every word that fell from his lips was treasured up in her mind; every opinion that he uttered was followed to the letter; her looks, her language, nay, her very reflections, were changed by his example and precepts. In public, it is true, she assumed the mask of gaiety, but here her conversation, though not less brilliant, was more tempered, and her whole appearance, to a discriminating eye, might have displayed a greater regard for those feminine qualities which Clifford had so highly extolled.

In the mean time William's popularity was on the wane, the court ladies pronounced him the coldest and most insensible of a phlegmatic nation; while the regent began to think there was something unaccountable in the young Englishman, whom he had honoured with his especial notice, and with a general invitation to those private banquets from which many of the French nobles were excluded. That a man, on whom nature and fortune had both smiled, should lead so monastic a life, and disregard the advantages which he enjoyed; that he should

make his first and last appearance at one of those suppers, in which Philip of Orleans delighted, and only appear afterwards at the grand and general entertainments, all this awakened the suspicions of the regent. The observations which he had individually made, combined with some secret intelligence, induced him to believe the young foreigner's mind was engrossed by politics and party schemes. To what point they tended, and how far they were to be dreaded, was now a matter of some consideration for his highness.

William's increased intimacy with Mirabel was to him rather a subject of amusement than of jealousy, as he always looked upon her conduct in the same light, and awaited the day when a declaration from Clifford's lips would reward the baronne's perseverance, and afford her the glorious opportunity of delivering up, as usual, her suitor and his proposals to unlimited ridicule. It is true that Mirabel's manner occasionally staggered the duke's judgment of the case; but he only admired her subtlety the more for adapting her demeanour to the rigid notions of a foreigner.

Roland Stanley had not failed to seek his

countryman a short time after the few words that had passed between them ; and Clifford, reflecting that the high road was in fact open to any man, and that he had no proof of Stanley's intention to act the spy, candidly acknowledged that he had spoken hastily, and begged that all might be forgotten.

On the morning of the second masquerade, which took place about a month after the first we have described—having been deferred so long in consequence of the bride elect's indisposition—Roland once more visited Clifford.

His manner was earnest and important, and there was a laboured and mysterious tone in his language that foretold the approach of some weighty intelligence. Having once, however, commenced the subject, he proceeded to acquaint William that he had received letters from the court of England, in every one of which the name of Blanch Courtenay was mentioned in terms of the highest admiration. Here he stopped suddenly, assuming a look of regret, and intending that William should extort an unwilling detail of what was to follow. But Clifford knew his companion too well ; he plainly perceived that Stanley was bending be-

neath the weight of a secret, and was aware that he would gladly and speedily deposit the burden as soon as he found that no assistance was proffered. His acquaintance did not disappoint him: after a long pause, Stanley said that he himself was the last man calculated to be the bearer of unpleasant intelligence, it required so much caution, and prudence, and policy, all of which he had never possessed, yet there were instances in which he conceived silence to be a breach of friendship, and he felt, upon this occasion, that Clifford should be informed of the facts which his English letters announced.

Blanch Courtenay, he said, stood high at court, she had a wonderful influence with royalty, and many courtiers were already disputing the prize; but it was confidently asserted that she was already betrothed to the Earl of Dalmaine, a young man of high birth and large fortune, a friend and constant companion of the king. They were inseparable, and Sir Philip Courtenay himself had informed one of Stanley's correspondents, that the period for their marriage was fixed, although not announced to the world.

Stanley then added, with an air of candour and kindness, that he did wish to inquire into

his countryman's secrets, but it required little penetration to know that such intelligence must be unpleasing to him, although it were better to hear the truth, while there remained a possibility of obviating the evil. Then, with a precipitancy that was not quite worthy of his calculating powers, Roland proposed to Clifford to be the bearer of certain private and confidential letters, which were addressed to some courtiers who were immediately about the royal person, but whose loyalty was most questionable. Working himself up to a pitch of enthusiasm, which he trusted might have due effect upon his companion, this eager Jacobite affirmed that a glorious crisis was at hand, and that it now only required the interposition of a stranger, one to whom no suspicion could be attached, to direct the whole scheme with success. He depicted in flattering terms the requisites of unshrinking courage and fidelity, of noble and steady purpose, of enterprising but judicious conduct; and then turning abruptly to William, exclaimed,

“ Tell me, Clifford, will you assist in restoring England her king, and Blanch Courtenay to her lover ?”

William heard him in silence, with conflicting emotions. Strong as he was in the belief of

Blanch's constancy, he felt alarmed, now that he saw her day of trial was at hand. He pictured her unhappy and restless; tormented by the fear of premature discovery, which perhaps led her to listen with apparent complacency to one she could not love. He called up Madame D'Aubry's description of Sir Philip, and dreaded the effect of his anger, which would bruise, though it could not break, the spirit of his daughter. But when Stanley changed the subject; when the never-failing topic was started, and the proposal made, that he should carry letters to treacherous dependants, and seek the court to which Blanch belonged, as a traitor and a spy, his indignation was roused, and his anger broke forth.

"Never!" he cried; "you might have known me better, sir! Had I been willing to break the dying commands of my father, and espouse the interests of an exiled house, I would have dedicated my sword to its service, and have bled for the Stuarts on the field. But to return to my native country, after so long an absence, in the despicable office of a traitor and a spy—to league myself with those vipers who would turn against the hand that now protects them—do you dare to propose such a thing to me?

Were it not for our long acquaintance ; were it not, Stanley, that I believe you blinded by infatuation, I would call upon you to answer for having believed me capable of such detestable meanness, and for daring to couple the name of one I love better than life, with a proposition replete with disgrace, and unworthy the consideration of a man of honour."

"I thank you, Clifford," replied the other, in a low tone of suppressed resentment; "you are pleased to exercise your powers of language on me, and will, I have no doubt, add cowardice to the list of desirable qualities with which you have invested me: but you are safe from my sword, which has been dedicated to the cause you hold so meanly. But it is time that our acquaintance should be broken off. Since the days we met at Bordeaux, a change has come over all your feelings: your heart is set on other things now, and, as I said before, old friends and new loves do not well together.—Nay, Clifford, I am gone—need I remind you, that in your own house you cannot draw upon an unresisting foe? My life is at this moment valuable to some, though neither to you or to myself; but on my return from Eng-



land, I shall await your commands." He bowed distantly, and left the apartment.

Were we to follow the course of William's reflections upon the varied vexations, anxieties, and apprehensions which the delay of his uncle's letters, combined with many other circumstances, occasioned, we should have little else to relate. Leaving these, therefore, to the reader's imagination, we will accompany him to the masquerade at the palace, where his object was to see and converse with Mirabel, whom he now considered as the only friend he possessed in Paris.

She was, however, in close attendance upon the duchess, who being in an ill humour herself, thought fit to vent it upon her attendants, and seemed to take especial pleasure in detaining the baronne in particular from her anticipated amusement. Mirabel found means, nevertheless, to explain the fact to William, and he accordingly left the presence-chamber, and sauntered through the long range of apartments, with less interruption than on the previous night. He became weary at length, and finding an open window, with a covered balcony that was sheltered from the cold,

he went out to enjoy the aspect of the night. It was mild and clear; the full moon cast a chequered light upon the gardens below, and her pale yellow beams wandered in and out among the evergreens, and traversed many of the serpentine walks, throwing the neighbouring ground into stronger shadow. The sky was cloudless; but of the starry train, one chosen handmaid alone shone brightly, though humbly, by the side of the queen of night.

William gazed for some moments at the heavens, and on looking round, he perceived that he had a companion in his observations. A mask dressed in what was then called the Spanish domino, which consisted of a large cloak and plumed hat, stood by his side, and leaned with him upon the balustrade. They remained together for some time without exchanging a word; and then the new comer addressed William.

“Your meditations are so profound, noble minstrel, that you will scarcely thank me for intruding on them; and yet, as I passed by the open window, and saw so fair a scene without, and the very man I sought standing upon the

balcony, the temptation was too great to withstand, even at the risk of being called unwelcome."

"You sought me?" said William, eyeing the mask as if he would penetrate the black vizard which effectually concealed the wearer's face. "It remains with you to tell me then, on what errand you are bound, and I will forthwith in all candour shape my welcome accordingly."

"I am on a friendly mission," replied the domino; "and though it is my purpose to remain unknown, do not, I pray you, treat the warning I am about to give you as idle."

"Warning!" said Clifford, with a smile. "Now by my faith, good mask, that same word 'warning' is one that I seldom attend to. Caution and I have little sympathy; for he who measures every step he takes, will find the path of life more irksome and rugged than of necessity it is. But think me not uncourteous; that which is well meant will ever be well received by me."

"You English," continued the other, "consider rashness and courage as synonymous terms; but let me inquire if a lodging in the Bastille, or Vincennes, would be palatable to your impetuous disposition, or—"

“Or”—interrupted William, believing that he had now perceived the drift of the stranger’s insinuations; “or whether it would not be better to follow the suggestions of a mutual acquaintance, and fly imaginary dangers to incur certain ones.”

“I do not understand your meaning,” replied the mask; “but as far as imaginary dangers are concerned, a suspicious tyrant, and a treacherous mistress, who are leagued together against you, are enemies not the less to be dreaded because they lie in ambush.”

“The figure of your speech, sir,” rejoined Clifford sternly, “may be apt, but it requires an explanation: the prince whom I suppose you have thought proper to stigmatize as a tyrant, is one to whom I owe some thanks, and no allegiance. But I must request you will assist me to the lady’s name, which you have most unwarrantably coupled with mine.”

The mask laughed provokingly. “You should not judge so slightly of my penetration, Mr. Clifford,” he continued; “there is but one of our French dames on whom you deign to smile; and yet, when I call to mind the philippic I once heard, launched from your lips against the

manners and morals of our good city, it makes me smile to think that you should have installed Mirabel de Bernay in a heart dedicated to the austerity of virtue."

"Comte de Salins!" exclaimed William, "I might have sooner guessed the disinterested friend who wished to provide for my safety, even at the expense of that fair fame which has yet escaped detraction; but I will deal more openly with you,—that man who dares to utter a gross calumny, in my presence, against the Baronne de Bernay, must either retract his words, and own himself a liar and a coward, or maintain the falsehood with his sword, and seal it with his blood!"

As Clifford spoke, he placed his hand upon his weapon, an action that was imitated by the mask, who, however, thus continued:

"In recognising me, Mr. Clifford, you must be sensible that you are speaking with one in whom your sword could inspire no terror, since mine has been measured with the best in the land, and twice with fatal success; but I did not intend that my counsels should lead to altercation, and when you consider the matter calmly the quarrel will appear scarcely justifiable. That

you have more reason than any other person to espouse the baronne's cause is obvious; but the very circumstance that delegates such authority, at the same time precludes the possibility of exercising it too fully. But it is ever thus with the best of us; the errors which our unbiassed judgment condemns are easily palliated when turned to our individual advantage. I am speaking generally, and beg that you will acquit me of all intention to be personal in my remarks."

"You wrong me, M. le Comte," replied Clifford; "but, above all, you foully wrong the Baronne de Bernay, nor can I permit so false a charge to remain unrefuted. The right I claim to stand forward as the champion of your fair countrywoman arises merely from that obligation which binds every man of honour to resent a falsehood coupled with his name, which slander would cast upon a virtuous woman's reputation."

A sound between a laugh and a sneer escaped the domino's lips, who exclaimed,

"You carry the farce too far, sir Englishman; you would not surely enter your asseverations in the lists against my observations, or

gainsay a fact that is as well-known to our good city of Paris as to yourself and me. But if you are willing to exercise your skill in pleading, it would be no unworthy occasion to display your powers, by explaining the mysterious bond which connects you with this paragon, since love has had no voice in the affair."

"The friendship which subsists between myself and the baronne," replied Clifford, who strove to curb his indignation, lest it should tell to Mirabel's disadvantage, "is of that nature which neither of us need blush to own; but allow me to assure you, that, so far from pleading her cause, as you somewhat insolently express yourself, I should consider such a step derogatory to her; nor do I comprehend by what authority you constitute yourself a judge either of her actions or mine."

He paused for a few moments, and then added,

"I wait your pleasure, sir, to know if you intend making me an open apology and retraction of your insinuations, or to follow me and abide by the consequences."

"Forgive me," replied the domino, "if I still doubt your intention of adventuring your

life in so light a cause, or wasting so much enthusiasm on so worthless an object."

"Follow me, sir," said Clifford, "yonder door leads down a staircase into the garden, and there you will easily learn what my intentions are."

He pushed the door aside, and, followed by the domino, descended the stairs hastily, threw his cloak upon the grass, and, drawing his sword, placed himself in an attitude of defiance. His antagonist also unsheathed his weapon, but Clifford dropped his point, on perceiving that the count still retained his mantle, and remonstrated with him in vain.

"No," he replied, "I would not be known, and only request, in case I am wounded, that you will convey me privately from this spot."

"M. de Salins," said Clifford, "replacing his own cloak, "this is no time for ceremony; I entreat you to remember the fearful advantage which my stature gives me over you, particularly at this moment, when your limbs are encumbered with that immense mantle; tell me that you spoke in anger and I will accept your apology, even at the last moment."

"I am not one," replied his companion,



dryly, "to change my opinion of man or woman at the bidding of another."

Here he crossed his sword with that of William, displaying in the single pass that took place, certainly more grace than vigour.

"You are right," cried the mask, "this cloak is unbearable, and even the hat and plume obstruct my view."

Thus saying, the stranger threw off the disguise, and stood before William in the full dress of the duchess's maids of honour.

"Good Heavens!" cried William, "what can this mean, and what has induced you to expose yourself to such danger?"

Mirabel answered him half playfully, half timidly.

"Many reasons," she replied, "first, because to-night, I hardly know why, but I have had an odd feeling come over me, a thirst for amusement, and I wished to prove my proficiency in masking, by conversing with you for a while without detection; and lastly, because—though I almost fear you will blame me—I longed to ascertain how I really stood in your estimation, and if you would consider the cause of Mirabel worthy to be espoused."

“And over and above all,” continued Clifford, “you wished to display your skill in fencing, at the risk of making me a murderer?”

“Oh no,” she replied, “you rate both my courage and my vanity too highly. Had you stood upon the offensive instead of the defensive, the *denouement* would have been more speedy, and the encomium on my fencing lost. You are displeased with me, I fear,” she added; “but nevertheless this incident will be a source of eternal pride and gratification; for, I am convinced, there is not one of those who pour their unheeded protestations daily in my ear, that would resent an attack upon Mirabel de Bernay as nobly as you have done this night.”

Not a little excited by the success of the adventure, the baronne’s countenance assumed that joyous and animated expression which was so familiar to it in former days.

“I feel happier,” she cried, “than I have done for many a day, and am grateful for the feeling, though I know it is to be transient. The duchess detained me so long, for no other earthly purpose than to torment me with her ill-humour, that when her highness did retire, I felt like an uncaged bird; the thought struck

me, in an instant I was equipped *à la Salins*, for whom I intended you to take me, and set out in search of you. But now that we are alone, and out of the hearing of any one, will you redeem your promise relative to your affair with the Duke of P——; I am impressed with an idea that I may be of use in this matter, and it is hardly generous to deprive me of the only opportunity I may ever have of proving my gratitude.”

“Another time,” replied Clifford, “I am not in the mood to talk on such a subject at this moment. I have had so much to vex and thwart me lately, that I am out of conceit with myself, and the world in general.”

“Do not say so,” replied Mirabel, sadly; “or at least do not include me in that world, with which I have now so little sympathy; but it is not for me to hurry that confidence, whose effect I gather from what you once told me, might be to restore you to her you love. Alas! William, I have vowed to further your happiness by every means in my power, but knowing the secrets of my heart, you will forgive the weakness which cannot desire sincerely any event that may hasten an eternal separation.”

“Nay, do not speak in so sad a tone!” exclaimed her companion, as he saw the tear that trembled in the moonlight, “such subjects are painful to us both.”

“What a lovely night!” she broke off suddenly, looking up to the sky. “A night when those who love, send a thousand thoughts and wishes in the direction of the absent. Do you know, William, sometimes I think the stars above us are the homes of the blessed, and that Gaspard looks down upon his sister from the brightest among them. He is my guardian angel now ; I am sure he would not suffer any other to possess that office but himself. Oh, William Clifford, William Clifford ! he sees us both at this moment ; he knows what you have been to me, and he blesses you as I do.”

She turned aside her face for one moment, and then continued :

“But I will not talk of myself, for I know your thoughts are wandering with your heart. Speak to me then of her you love, for I can bear it now ; describe her to me ; let me know the human being that is worthy of your love?”

“Oh, Mirabel,” replied Clifford, “I feel that it is kind and noble of you to speak in this man-

ner, but do not ask me to dwell upon what she is ; do not ask me to describe her. Nothing that I said could give you an idea of her beauty, her goodness, her disinterested nature, disinterested as your own ; and, believe me, she would appreciate your character—she would love you, Mirabel !”

“No, no !” exclaimed the other, eagerly, “she would not, she could not love me, and I—I should hate her ! You do not know how often she occupies my thoughts ; I think of her, and strive to picture her to my mind, but in vain ; sometimes I fancy that my heart expands towards the woman, with whom its dearest feelings are in common, and then again a fearful feeling of hatred takes possession of my mind. Alas ! such violence is no doubt foreign to her gentle nature ; she would shrink from such as me ! What would I give to see her ; perhaps, perhaps, William, I might learn to love her, at least I might admire and emulate her. Have you no portrait, no resemblance, in your possession, to appease my curiosity in some degree ?”

“Yes,” replied Clifford, “I have a small, but imperfect copy of a large picture that was painted at Bordeaux, which I always wear.”

“Let me see it! You will not refuse me so simple a request!” exclaimed the baronne, earnestly, “you do not know how my mind is set upon it?”

“The moon is very bright,” said Clifford, “but it is a bad moment to judge of the painting.”

He took the miniature from his bosom, and gave it to Mirabel, who looked at it for several moments without speaking, while a thousand conflicting emotions rose within her at the sight of Blanch’s portrait.

“She is fair,” said the baronne at length, with some hesitation; “and her hair seems golden.—Is she tall then?”

“Yes,” replied Clifford, “you are right. She is above the ordinary height.”

A deep, deep sigh, which forced its way, in spite of her efforts to check its progress, followed these remarks, and then she returned the picture.

“It is beautiful,” she said, “most beautiful. They are happy whose countenance can reflect their soul, and vouch for its nobleness.”

A pause ensued, painful to both, which was at length broken by William.

“There are people coming down the stair-

case," he cried, hurriedly; "put on your hat and mask, and draw your cloak round you: they have been attracted by the glitter of my sword, which I unfortunately did not sheathe."

"Holy Virgin! what will become of me!" cried Mirabel; "one of them looks like the regent. For pity's sake do not let them discover me."

"Draw your sword, then," said William, "and play the part of Monsieur de Salins boldly, for we may be hardly tried."

The baronne obeyed, but she trembled so violently as to retard her efforts, and she had hardly reassumed the disguise before the regent came up, attended by several courtiers.

"Hold, gentlemen!" he cried; "the first who strikes another blow will have to deal with Philip of Orleans! Is your valour so impetuous as to require a display at the expense of the law, even in our very gardens?—For you, sir Englishman, who will no doubt plead ignorance as an excuse, let me advise you to beware how you again brave the laws of the land in which you live: but your antagonist, at least, can offer no such idle apology—M. le Comte de Salins.—"

“Pardon me, my lord,” interrupted a courtier, “but three hours ago I saw the Comte de Salins stretched on a sick bed, too weak to raise his hand to his mouth.”

“Pasques Dieu !” exclaimed the duke ; “has the count gained a twin brother since yesterday ? or who has stolen his favour, his stature, and his taste for duelling ?”

He advanced towards Mirabel, whose usual presence of mind now forsook her ; and who sheltering herself behind William, addressed one word of earnest supplication in his ear. This movement elicited a general laugh from all but the duke and Clifford. The one was too angry, the other too much alarmed, to join in the mirth.

“My lord,” said William, resolved to interfere between Philip and the baronne at all risks, and addressing him firmly, but respectfully, at the same time covering her retreat to the staircase, “I sincerely crave your pardon for an involuntary breach of decorum ; but at the same time, permit me to remind you, that the code of laws, drawn up by your royal self, to regulate the affairs of masking, is as strict as any other, and to insist upon the discovery of any



mask, contrary to the will of the party concerned, is in direct opposition to that justice which you have ever supported."

As he concluded, he placed himself before the door, and listened anxiously to the sound of the baronne's rapid ascent, while the hope of her escape enabled him to sustain the duke's fury, and the sarcasms of his companions.

"Mr. Clifford has chosen a right formidable adversary, who takes to his heels on the first occasion," said one:—"A very Hercules in size and prowess," rejoined another.

"Gentlemen," exclaimed Clifford, "the presence of his highness alone prevents me from chastising the insolent language, which you would not dare to repeat elsewhere."

"Silence every one of you!" cried the duke, in a voice of thunder; "and do you, sir, lower the style of your language, and stand from before the doorway, that I may myself identify the enemy in whom you take so strange an interest."

Clifford turned to the door, which Mirabel had thrown to, behind her, and while apparently endeavouring to open it, gave the fugitive a few more moments.

But the regent was not easily to be imposed upon. "Your sword, Mr. Clifford!" he exclaimed angrily, as he said that the domino had escaped; "you are at liberty to leave the garden, but will, if you think proper, remain in your own house till you hear further from me."

Clifford deliberately unbuckled his sword, and presented it to the regent in silence; but as he did so, Roland Stanley stepped forward from among the bystanders, and kneeled before Philip. "Suffer me," he said, "to intercede for my countryman, who is unacquainted with the etiquette of courts, and has not resided sufficiently long in Paris to be informed of all the salutary laws with which your highness has provided for its safety."

"Your interference is ill-timed, sir," replied the duke, "you have been a witness to Mr. Clifford's total disregard of the royal authority vested in my person." As he spoke, however, his eye was attracted by the sudden reappearance of the domino at the foot of the stairs; and uttering a tremendous oath, he strode towards the door, bidding any one cross him at their peril. The figure remained motionless until the duke, grasping it rudely by the

arm, dragged, rather than led, it into the open moonlight. There was a breathless pause ; William looked on in horror, firmly believing that Mirabel would prefer death to discovery ; it was impossible to rescue her, and yet as the duke with a brutal violence, that was aggravated by suspicion and jealousy, tore off the disguise, Clifford advanced a step, in the determination of protecting the baronne at any risk ; he stopped, however, in speechless astonishment, which was shared by all around. at the unexpected apparition that met their eyes.

It was a young boy, of a graceful and dignified carriage, who wore a magnificent suit of crimson, embroidered with gold ; his brown hair hung low upon his shoulders, and his large dark eye had an expression of timid archness, which enhanced his native beauty. The duke's unmannerly conduct had called the colour into his cheeks, and there was a mixture of pride and hesitation in his deportment which was in itself captivating.

“ The king ! ” burst at once from every lip, while the duke himself stood uncovered and most of the courtiers bent the knee.

“This is a strange frolic for your majesty to be engaged in,” observed the regent, in a tone of respectful vexation.

“True, cousin Philip,” replied the boy, “the fear of your displeasure prompted me to remain concealed ; but it would be cowardly to allow your anger to fall upon an innocent person, and I stake you my word that Mr. Clifford is as astonished as yourself at this discovery ! At least,” he added, smiling, “I have afforded you all much diversion— all but my unfortunate preceptor, Fleury, who, without doubt, is at this moment running like one distracted over the corridors. Do you forgive me, dear cousin ?” he added, taking the regent’s hand affectionately ; “or would you compel the king to sue in vain, before so large an assembly ?”

The duke, who loved the young monarch truly and disinterestedly, kissed the little hand which was extended, and drawing it under his arm, begged him to retire.

“One moment more, Philip !” exclaimed the boy : and he whispered a few words in the regent’s ear, whose natural goodhumour was restored by the playfulness of the noble child, and by a discovery which relieved his mind from not

a few jealous apprehensions. He smiled, and replied in the same low tone, though these words only were audible :

“ As your majesty pleases.”

The king turned to the group of listeners, with an air of childish consequence, “ Mr. Clifford,” he said, “ the Duke of Orleans, in discovering his kinsman to be the culprit, has, with less regard to justice than usual, waved all punishment ; Here is your sword, the one which I now wear will always be valuable to me, from the recollection of this night.”

“ And mine doubly so !” exclaimed Clifford, taking back his own, from the king’s hand, “ from having been honoured by the touch of Louis the Fifteenth.”

The duke and his royal charge now saluted the bystanders, and ascending the staircase, entered the private apartments.

William stepped forward to thank Stanley for his friendly interposition, but he was met coldly.

“ You are fortunate,” said the other, “ to interest all sexes and ages in your favour ; and I hope, for the sake of those concerned, that no one less discreet than Roland Stanley, ob-

served how, on the mask's reappearance, the cloak trailed upon the ground, or that during his majesty's short absence, he changed the buckles of his shoes. Farewell, Clifford, you have lost a friend where you might have secured one; but for your refusal of my last proposition, I remain your debtor. The man who could so soon forget his plighted vows were but a sorry addition to a cause, which depends wholly upon the constancy of its adherents."

He turned and left the garden, ere William could reply.

Ere we conclude this chapter it may be necessary to give some explanation of the part that the young king had taken in the transaction, which explanation can be conveyed in a few words.

When the baronne reached the top of the staircase, she avoided the public apartments; and, acquainted with the locality of the palace, turned immediately into a small vestibule, which led to the private rooms allotted to the royal family. Her consternation can scarcely be described when she perceived a figure leaning out of the window, as if in the act of listening

to the conversation which had just taken place below. The noise of the door opening attracted his notice, and Mirabel knew not at first whether she ought to derive any consolation from perceiving that it was the young king himself, who, having assisted at the fête, slept for that night beneath the Duke of Orleans's roof.

He turned towards her immediately: "I saw it all!" he exclaimed, "fly, baronne for your life; my cousin's fury is not to be braved, and in another moment he will pursue you."

"Oh, my lord," said Mirabel, falling on one knee, and tearing the mask from her face, while a sudden hope flashed across her mind; "you told me the other evening, when we danced together, that you would grant me any request that lay in your power; do not, for mercy's sake, refuse me now!"

"What do you mean, madam?" inquired the boy, half delighted, half alarmed by this appeal to his childish protection: "what good can I possibly do upon this occasion, except by keeping your secret from my cousin?"

"Put on this disguise, sire," she replied, "and go down into the garden, that it may

be supposed your majesty was the fugitive ! You have heard all that passed and therefore need no directions how to act."

"But what will the regent say, my dear baronne, if by any means he should discover the truth ?" said the king with some hesitation.

"There is no danger, there is nothing to fear !" cried Mirabel, earnestly.

"Give me the disguise !" exclaimed Louis the Fifteenth, the colour mounting to his cheeks, "I never said I was *afraid* !"

The dress was quickly adjusted, and whispering one word of admonition in his ear, the baronne led her youthful accomplice to the head of the staircase, while, crouched below the balustrade, she heard every word that passed, and only returned home when satisfied that William Clifford was at liberty.



CHAPTER II.

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THE journey of life may in some respects resemble a road through a mountainous country, along which we travel on for some time, amid a continuation of the same kind of scenery, till suddenly a new winding of the path brings us upon a landscape entirely dissimilar from that we have just left behind us. Often do a few hours suffice to convey us from accustomed scenes and familiar society, to those which are totally opposite, in appearance, character, and interest, while the unbridled horses of destiny hurry us forward, in spite of regret or remonstrance. Such a change must we now present to any friendly eyes that gaze upon this page; but in the present instance, at least, the reader will be welcomed by an old friend, in the per-

son of Blanch Courtenay. Taking leave of Paris, we must then conduct him, the reader, in the direction of Hampton Court Palace ; a residence, whose comparative seclusion during the absence of George the First, cannot fail to present a striking contrast to the gay and dissipated court of Philip of Orleans.

It may be remembered that we left Blanch on the night of her return to her father's abode, and it will be therefore necessary to go back a few months, for the purpose of continuing the narrative of her personal adventures from that period. The palace was then thinly tenanted, several of its inmates absent at their several estates, and others in active attendance upon the royal person. But Sir Philip Courtenay seldom left Hampton Court, except to pay his respects to the king in London, and thus Blanch for some time saw no one but her parents, a cause of rejoicing to her, though not to them.

Summer was in her pride, and Blanch found much to enjoy in the home allotted to her. Her parents, who vied with each other in complying with her wishes, fitted up her apartments in the style she preferred ; and Sir Philip, who

often inspected with his daughter those parts of the palace which were interesting from historical association, readily acceded to her request of adding one room to her particular suite. It was small and confined, but possessed more charms, in Blanch's sight, than many of its spacious neighbours, on whose antique appearance, bad taste had made many inroads. The walls were painted in fresco, representing the last supper of our Lord, and the illuminated arabesques of the cornice, were elaborate and curious. The story ran, that this small chamber had been appropriated by three widely-opposed personages, who had severally inhabited the palace, Wolsey, Charles the First, and Oliver Cromwell, and it was also positively asserted that the cheshire prophet and court jester Nixon had died of starvation, from having been locked up and forgotten, in that very room. One part of its history alone was sufficient to consecrate the spot in Blanch's eyes. It had served as an oratory to the royal martyr, Charles, a monarch in whose fate her liveliest sympathies had ever been engaged. She did not regard him with the false enthusiasm which leads us to extol even the faults of those in whom we are inte-

rested ; but she loved to view him in the latter years of his life, when chastened, though not conquered, by adversity ; all the nobler and better qualities of his nature shone brightly amid the gloom of persecution and sorrow. A considerable portion of those days had been passed by Charles as a prisoner in his own palace ; and Blanch would picture him to herself kneeling before the little oaken altar, and breathing that spirit of humiliation to his God which he scorned to display before his fellow men. Who could tell, she thought, to what secret prayers that oratory had been witness, what contrition for former errors, what intercession for that family which he loved so tenderly ? To consecrate the room more especially to his memory, Blanch caused a small copy of the magnificent equestrian picture by Vandyke, to be placed in the recess. No other painting of any kind was admitted—excepting, indeed, a view of the chapel of St. Estelle, a drawing by William Clifford.

Sir Philip looked upon the taste as trifling, but wishing to conciliate his daughter, was only too happy that her ambition should be so limited, while Lady Courtenay was at a loss to

conceive how Blanch could prefer that dull corner to their spacious drawing-room.

The ancient courts and cloisters of the palace, which spoke so distinctly of days long passed, were to Blanch full of interest; but in the beautiful gardens that were annexed to the building she would pass all her loved hours of thought. Their broad terraces and grass parterres, ornamented, though not overstocked, with statues and fountains, encircled by a boundary of tall lime-trees, and skirted on one side by the river Thames, formed indeed a pleasing retreat, both during the heat of the day, or at the sweet still hour of evening. But Blanch loved to be alone, because solitude was dedicated to William.

At first hope was so high within her that she rejoiced in believing their separation would not prove as insupportable as she at one time supposed. But this bright delusion did not last long, and there were times when the thought that to-day, ay and to-morrow, must pass without the possibility of seeing him; that there was no step to be listened for, no sweet anxiety to be experienced, when the opening of the door foretold the approach of some one — of any

one but him—was almost insupportable. She never heard his name, except when she fondly murmured it in her own hearing, and then looked around half afraid lest any one should be near to catch that well-loved sound. Oh! how long, and how fully did she dwell upon the remembrance of every word and look, returning again and again to her cherished store, until memory could yield no more nourishment, in her heart's famine. She loved the silent communion of her own reflections better than the brightest conversation of others, and although the recollection of the past helped to render the present more gloomy, she would not have parted with one thought connected with happier days. Alas! who would give up the faculty of retrospection, even while they rail against it. The weary and dispirited traveller, compelled to pursue his way amid arid and burning tracts, can still derive consolation from the thought, that the fertile land from whence he came, is yet in sight. There, while the sun pours its scorching rays upon his unprotected head, still with a fond and lingering look, he gazes upon valley, wood, and vineyard, and his aching vision, at least, is refreshed by their distant verdure.

In like manner felt Blanch ; but while dwelling upon the past, and dreaming of the future, she endeavoured to render the present as tranquil as she could. Grateful to her parents, she strove to regard them both with love, but she found with regret that they were neither of them what she had been fond enough to fancy. Her mother's character in some degree resembled that of Madame D'Aubry, but the latter was at least a rational, if not an agreeable companion, and Lady Courtenay appeared to have no fixed idea of her own, on any subject whatsoever. The marked difference of Sir Philip's demeanour towards his wife and daughter, too, was most distressing to the latter, for it gave her no pleasure to see the opinions of her mother openly slighted, while her own were, comparatively speaking, esteemed.

All was calm, however, and thus the days passed, without any incident to break their monotony, until one morning, when Blanch was sitting alone, the female attendant, whom Madame D'Aubry had placed in her service, entered the room, and, with divers apologies and lamentations over her own negligence, she proceeded to tell her mistress, that on the eve of

their departure from Bordeaux, a parcel had been intrusted to her care. She did not know whence it came, but there were strict orders not to deliver it until they arrived in England; and the penitent waiting-woman confessed that she had forgotten the circumstance until that morning.

“I was told, madam,” she said, “that the court was expected soon, and so I thought you might want the brocade dresses, and among them, where I had put it for safety, I found the box.”

Blanch easily forgave her, and waited impatiently until the door closed to examine the contents of the packet. It scarcely needed the well-known writing to tell her that it came from William. She opened it as hastily as the careful sealing would allow, and found a small note, directed to herself. For a few moments the writing appeared illegible, the letters danced before her eyes, and her heart beat as if the writer stood in her presence.

“Could you but know, my Blanch,” the note began, “the value I have ever set upon the accompanying miniature, you would accept as a strong proof of my affection a gift, which



may perhaps appear trifling. It has hitherto been my dearest possession, and yet you will smile when I tell you, it is the portrait of a mother, who died so early that her beautiful face, and sweet voice are the only traces of her which remain imprinted on my memory. She bequeathed the portrait to me as her only child; my father had never seen it, during her lifetime, but after her death, he would sit and look at it, till the tears ran down his cheeks; and yet, I have heard, she only repaid his devotion by a cold fulfilment of her domestic duties. On me she doted, and to leave me she grieved; even now I have a faint recollection of her melancholy caresses, when dying. Perhaps it is the tenour of my own feelings at this moment, with regard to yourself, that induces me to believe the picture was originally designed by my mother for some object of an early attachment. But the date, which is previous to her acquaintance with my father, and the inscription (quoted from some favourite old French authors) justify the supposition. Wear it often and value it highly for the sake of William!"

With a hand trembling with agitation,

Blanch lifted the picture. It was that of a young and extremely handsome woman, whose features and expression she would have considered too masculine, had not this very circumstance rendered the resemblance to William more palpable. She perceived at once his intention of presenting her with a memorial of himself, which might be worn without exciting any suspicion in others; and from her very heart she thanked him.

The portrait was set with diamonds, and on the back was inscribed, "*Marguerite au sien amy doulce, mande*"; and a little lower, "*Mieux en ton cuer, cent fois descript.*"

She was still gazing on it, when she was surprised by her father, who entered gently. Sir Philip was himself startled by his daughter's occupation, and bent anxiously over her shoulder to inspect the miniature.

"Why, my dear Blanch," he said, laughing, "that blush, and that start, quite deceived me; I expected to find some fierce-looking cuirassier, or dapper Bordellois, with a view of his vineyards in the back-ground, to remind you of himself and his possessions, at the same time, and lo, it is but the resemblance of some deter-

mined-looking damsel, to whom you are bound no doubt by the indissoluble ties of female friendship."

"Oh, no," replied Blanch, smiling, though scarcely at ease, so ill-timed had been her father's entrance; "I have never seen the original of this portrait: she was the mother of a friend of mine."

There was a pause; and Blanch dreaded lest the next question should relate to that friend.

"She was one," continued Sir Philip, "I should have been sorry to deal with. Most women have a way of their own; but hers was no trifling will, depend on it. I did not, however, intrude into your sanctuary, dedicated to the memory of deceased sovereignty, and existing friendships, without a cause. I came to tell you, that the dull and uninteresting life you have lately led, is happily at an end for some time: his gracious majesty arrives to-morrow, and has signified his intention of passing several months between Hampton Court and London, so that part of the court will remain here, even when he is absent for a week or two. You do not look so pleased as I

fancied you would ; but depend upon it, Blanch, you will find the difference agreeable, after being shut up here like a cloistered nun, with your father and mother, for confessor and abbess. Trust me, I know enough of youth to be certain that a splendid ball-room will appear more charming than our dull fireside ; and that you will find it a pleasanter occupation to listen to the sweet speeches of the gay young courtiers, than to sit in this dark room with your eyes fixed upon the portrait of friendship once removed.—Nay, I did not mean to hurt you, dear Blanch,” he continued ; “but this news has raised my spirits. I wish that blush could last until our royal master saw you, or that you would promise to get up another like it, for the occasion.”

“ You are laughing at me, my dear father,” answered Blanch, striving to conceal her emotion : “I have no doubt I shall appear most awkward in the royal presence ; being totally ignorant of all form and customs, I must trust to my mother, and yourself for instructions on that head.”

“ Not in the least : your ignorance will delight his majesty ; and you have only to repeat

the graceful courtesy you threw away the other day in the garden, on some humble individual, and I will answer for its effect. But I have many preparations to make, and so have you : let me entreat you to be most attentive to your appearance. Lady Courtenay will, I have no doubt, lend you some of the family jewels—there are enough for both of you. Your mother and I must receive the royal party at the gates, but I think it will be better to defer your presentation until the evening.”

So saying, and with his head running on a thousand speculations, which fortunately for his daughter's peace were not divulged, Sir Philip Courtenay left the room.

Blanch turned once more to an earnest examination of the picture, while the thoughts of flattery and admiration, which her father had striven to awaken, were cast from her ere he left the room. Yet at this moment she regretted more than ever the necessity of concealment. She felt that it would be a sad trial to mix in society, and be considered as one at liberty to listen to any suit, when she was in fact the promised wife of another. But that was nothing compared to the sor-

row of living beneath her father's roof, receiving daily proofs of kindness, and yet allowing her parents to remain in ignorance of her engagement. It appeared to her an act of passive duplicity, and though they had never inquired, directly or indirectly, if she had formed any attachment, she felt that should they do so, she could hide the fact no longer. In the mean time, she resolved to conform in every possible way to their will, and to show them every possible duty and attention.

The eventful day of the king's arrival at last came, and was hailed by Sir Philip with joy. Towards the afternoon every thing was prepared, and the zealous courtier, awaiting the return of some messengers, who were stationed on the road to give him timely notice, was in all the bustle of excitement. At last the signal was given, and hurrying Lady Courtenay across the courts, they received the king at the principal gate, where, contrary to custom, he alighted. Blanch stood at the open window, with no little curiosity, and at last perceived her father emerge from the archway, while on his arm there leaned a middle-aged man, dressed in a plain suit of brown cloth. The exultation of Sir Philip's

step, first led her to believe it was the king who accompanied him, for George the First displayed but little dignity either in his appearance or manner. Immediately behind followed two ladies, whose personal charms, at least, did not appear to Blanch to account for the attention which was paid them by several courtiers. Innumerable gentlemen, officers, and pages followed, some of whom, having at length caught a glimpse of Blanch's fair face at the window, looked up, and directed their neighbour's attention thither, which caused her to withdraw hastily from the casement.

CHAPTER III.

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BLANCH had many minor causes for uneasiness besides that great one which pressed continually on her mind. The very anxiety which her parents expressed regarding her first appearance at court was in itself distressing to her. Lady Courtenay, indeed, by her continual suggestions and alterations of the dress which her daughter had selected for the evening of her presentation, would have wearied the patience of any less forbearing disposition; while Sir Philip, who could not stoop to the minutiae on which his wife enlarged, watched eagerly the opening of the door that led to Blanch's dressing-room. She came at last, and feeling sure that she would be an object of scrutiny to her father, endeavoured to conceal the slight em-



barrassment she felt, by inquiring, playfully, if he considered her fit to accompany him.

Sir Philip expressed himself perfectly satisfied; and indeed it would have been difficult to have found any fault with the fair creature before him.

Lady Courtenay had endeavoured to persuade her daughter to powder her beautiful hair; to drag it up by the roots, and disfigure herself according to the exaggerated fashion of the day. But Blanch entreated her permission to continue the same style of dress she had always worn at Bordeaux, which more nearly resembled the graceful and becoming costume of Louis the Fourteenth's time. No sooner did Sir Philip praise his daughter's dress, than Lady Courtenay became convinced of its beauty, and begged that Blanch would always continue it: then looking at her husband and child with mingled feelings of pride and pleasure, this strange compound of affection and weakness insisted upon Blanch's taking Sir Philip's arm, while she followed them through the long gallery that connected their rooms with the state apartments.

Blanch's heart beat fast, and her colour went and came; but her father's conception of the

cause was not the true one. It was the first time she had been in public since her arrival, and she felt as William had felt in Paris on a similar occasion. Her sensations, however, had with them more of apprehension, more of embarrassment, as passing through the corridors by the side of Sir Philip, she felt that the hour of trial might be drawing nearer, and more near.

Entering the presence-chamber suddenly, Blanch found herself in the midst of a scene of splendour which far surpassed any thing she had ever seen before, and in a crowd of utter strangers, and she clung still closer to her father's arm. Sir Philip whispered a few words to the lord chamberlain, and then turning in a hurried manner to his daughter, informed her that he had sent to solicit his majesty's permission to present her. On the chamberlain's return, Blanch followed him between her parents, and the king receiving her graciously, ventured a compliment in broken English, and kissed her upon both cheeks. Sir Philip looked anxiously round the room, and read in several countenances the admiration which he so much coveted for his daughter ; but he was moreover charmed with an audible panegyric upon her beauty, from

his majesty, which, to Blanch's peculiar notions, would have been better pronounced out of her hearing.

"My dear Philip," exclaimed Lady Courtenay, when the ceremony was concluded, "the Princess of Wales is in the next room : should we not present Blanch to her also ?"

"As you please," he replied carelessly; "you can do that yourself while I remain here, for her royal highness and I were never the best friends in the world."

Lady Courtenay led the way, and Blanch was much pleased with the kind though dignified reception that she met with from the princess, who was but too often neglected in a court whose monarch himself bore her no good will, on account of the differences which existed between himself and his son. By her side stood a beautiful girl, the lively and admired Miss Bellenden, whose respectful but sincere affection made up in a great measure for the cold civility of George the First's courtiers.

Lady Courtenay took a particular delight in making her daughter known to all her own friends and acquaintance, but after one or two general and uninteresting remarks, Blanch inva-

riably found herself abandoned to her own reflections.

There must surely be some ingredient in our national character which is inimical to forming new connexions ; something that recoils from entering into conversation even with that very person whose acquaintance has been voluntarily made. To what else can we attribute the strange phenomenon of two human beings who express a mutual wish to become known to each other, and then, having uttered one sentence apiece, relapse into a silence which is irksome to both, but which neither thinks proper to break ? It is not to be supposed that they can have many ideas in common ; but some at least we all have ; and there are many degrees between the dulness of unelicited and unconnected remarks, and the interchange of every thought and feeling. Blanch, in consequence, found herself lonely ; and although few passed her without some tacit or audible expression of admiration, there were none who of themselves appeared to court or covet her acquaintance. Nor had she any reason to wish for theirs in particular ; but as she looked round at the groups of people who appeared all to have some

topic on which to speak, some joke to renew, some point to discuss—when she saw the smile of salutation, the extended hand, and the friendly look, Blanch felt very lonely. She thought of the different manner in which a stranger was received at Bordeaux, and she gave way to the fatal error of comparison. It was so new to her to be neglected, to be forgotten, that the novelty of the circumstance made it appear more bitter. And yet she endeavoured to console herself with thinking, that if she were allowed thus to pass unnoticed, her situation in the end might, under her peculiar circumstances, be one of less difficulty. She did not understand the springs which regulated the machinery of that society in which she now appeared ; she did not know that even the opinion of some depended on the decision of a few ; that there were several at this very moment who were waiting anxiously, until the decree of those few had gone forth, to know if they might perceive her beauty, and cultivate her acquaintance.

Sir Philip, although he remained chiefly near the royal person, watched every movement of his daughter, and began to feel somewhat uneasy at the comparatively small effect which she pro-

duced. But he understood the cause right well, and was much relieved when Lord Dalmaine stepped forward and expressed his wish to be made known to Miss Courtenay. "Upon my word, Sir Philip," said he, "I have just been voting the thanks of the court to you, for having provided us with such a beautiful addition, on our return. Heaven knows, youth and beauty are scarce articles with us at present."

"I hope, my lord," replied Sir Philip, laughing, "you will not poison my daughter's unsophisticated ear, by such courtly speeches as these. You will have some compassion, I trust, upon her head, if you have none upon her heart."

Thus saying, he traversed the room, and having introduced his companion to Blanch, left them together, and returned to his post. Lord Dalmaine, however, claimed a prior acquaintance, from having seen Miss Courtenay at the window, and she had no difficulty in recognising one of the courtiers whom she had perceived crossing the quadrangle. He was a shrewd and clever man, and having been much struck by Blanch's whole appear-

ance, proceeded to converse in such a manner, as he thought would in all probability enlighten him as to her character and disposition. Under similar circumstances, the conversation of a woman is important, and one accustomed to the world would guard it, without allowing it to appear that she did so. Blanch perceived that the curiosity of her companion was excited, but her unostentatious modesty and tempered liveliness ensured his respect, while it increased his preconceived admiration. They talked on many subjects, and Blanch was sorry when they were interrupted by frequent requests to be presented to her. She did not hesitate to express her surprise at this sudden tide of popularity, to her newly-gained friend; but he smiled significantly and gave her no other explanation. He amused Blanch, however, by describing all the people present, and insisted in the course of the evening on making her known to Miss Bellenden, whom he affirmed was one of the only people that ever uttered a word of common sense in his hearing. When they parted, he expressed a hope that he might often have the pleasure of seeing her during the time the king remained at Hampton Court.

But it was not until Lady Courtenay congratulated her daughter, in precise terms, on having touched the hard heart of Lord Dalmaine, that Blanch trembled at the bare idea of such a possibility, and determined for the future to be even more careful and more reserved.

As we shall have frequent occasion to mention this nobleman's name in the course of the narrative, it will be necessary to make the reader more fully acquainted with him, which can only be done by referring to his previous history. He succeeded to the title, and found himself in the possession of a large fortune, and entirely his own master at an early age. Following the wild inclinations of youth, and both the bad counsels and bad examples of his friends, he plunged at once into extravagance and dissipation, and to his astonishment found, that both his fortune and his health were rapidly declining. Prompt and decided in all his measures, he sold his house in London, shut up the one he possessed in the country, and set forth upon his travels.

He remained several years abroad, during which time he saved sufficient money to enable him to live at ease on his own property when he



returned. The plan of life he had followed during his tour was completely at variance with his former pursuits. Possessing natural talents, with keen powers of enjoyment for all that was beautiful in art and nature, he now improved his mind by the study of the one, and his heart by the contemplation of the other. Thrown frequently upon himself for amusement, he found that he had hitherto considered his own intellect too meanly, and he derived a pure delight from cultivating those natural qualities with which he had been endowed.

He learned also to place his own estimate on persons and things, and to value them for their own merits; and disgusted with the ordeal through which he had passed, he loved to discover, and knew how to appreciate the freshness and freedom of a young uncontaminated mind. To him the world had proved indeed a purifying furnace, divesting the nobler ingredients of his character of the dross which once clung to them. But the experiment is a dangerous one, for, in minds of a weaker cast and less powers of resistance, the better qualities are but too often consumed the first, or the whole reduced to a heap of unprofitable ashes. Whilst

abroad, Lord Dalmaine had formed an attachment to a lady of singular beauty; but her levity and deceit were said to have prejudiced him against her sex in general, for, from the day he parted with her in anger, he had never been known to address any woman seriously, although his manner was remarked for a degree of courtesy approaching to gallantry. He was a great favourite with the king, who gave him an office of distinction in the household, and he was consequently courted and flattered by Sir Philip. The baronet, indeed, no sooner heard Lord Dalmaine's opinions of Blanch's beauty than he determined to leave no means untried to secure the young nobleman as his son-in-law. Could he have seen into the depths of Dalmaine's heart, he would have been even more elated, for something nearly resembling love was already kindled there, with a rapidity that was in keeping with a character the failing of which always had been a fondness for extremes.

CHAPTER IV.

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BLANCH was not slow in discovering that her speedy marriage was the object of Sir Philip's ambition, and the vigilance with which he watched her every look and movement, when in public, distressed her extremely. Her easy natural manner became constrained, and at times abrupt, from a dread of exciting that admiration which is so often sought after by those of her age and sex. To Lord Dalmaine, in particular, the change which took place was one of profound mystery and real interest. The evening of their first acquaintance had convinced him that Blanch possessed no ordinary powers of mind, and, moreover, that she found pleasure in conversing with one who could understand and participate in the opinions she expressed.

But on their next meeting, she appeared a different person, and although she greeted him kindly, there was something distant and uncommunicative in her whole deportment. Lord Dalmaine was surprised, but not discouraged, by this alteration, surprised only because he conceived, from Blanch's conversation, that she would rise superior to the caprices which he considered natural to women in general. Yet, even when she did interrupt herself in the midst of a discourse that was becoming animated, or relapse suddenly into silence without any apparent cause, he found her very waywardness preferable to the commonplace demeanour of others. He invariably courted her society, but, believing that she was not likely to understand or value an attachment that was formed so suddenly, he restrained his natural impetuosity, confined himself to general topics, and was contented for the present with paying her such attentions as she could not refuse to accept without proving that she considered them seriously.

Lady Courtenay could not conceal the pride which she felt at Lord Dalmaine's preference; her only alarm was lest Blanch's inexperienced

heart should fall too easy a prey, before her admirer had made up his mind on the subject. It never entered into her head that so young a woman could be made the object of a handsome young courtier's attentions, for any number of days together, without falling desperately in love, as she was fond of expressing herself. But Sir Philip's meditations on the subject were, as usual, more profound, and his anxiety deeper; he loaded Lord Dalmaine with civility, and made him a partner in all their domestic schemes of amusement: a system which was understood and despised by the young nobleman, even while he gladly availed himself of the opportunity of cultivating Blanch's acquaintance. She, in the mean time, would have been happy to seek solace in the rational intercourse of thought, which she now seldom enjoyed; but, as we have before remarked, she always dreaded entering on any subject that might produce an understanding of sympathy between them.

In the mean time the king, after passing some months at the palace, returned to London for a short time; and, to the surprise of some, Lord Dalmaine still lingered at Hampton Court.

It happened one evening that Blanch, accompanied by her father and mother, was walking in the gardens, about sunset, when they were joined by the young nobleman. Sir Philip at that moment felt an unaccountable anxiety to show Lady Courtenay, who hung on his arm, a very peculiar flower which he had remarked the day before, and they accordingly quickened their pace, leaving their daughter to converse with Lord Dalmaine.

Blanch had passed a sad day, counting the hours since she had heard of William, and foreseeing some of the trials that were in store for her. She had come to the sad conclusion, that neither of her parents could inspire her with confidence on any point. In their society she felt solitary and alone ; and then her heart flew back to the recollection of him she loved ; but, while she mourned in spirit, she was forced to deny herself the sweet solace of tears. In this mood Blanch had gladly acceded to her father's proposal of walking out to watch the sun set over the river ; for although the voice of nature could not dispel her melancholy, it softened and subdued it. At such a moment the accents of kindness, which resembled in no way

the guarded expressions of her father, or the insipid conversation of her mother, fell pleasantly on Blanch's ear, and she listened to her companion's remarks on the scene before them with satisfaction.

The western sky was one sheet of liquid gold, casting a beautiful light down the river, and on numerous little boats which now dotted the water. From this side the palace presented a truly picturesque appearance, with numerous ornamented towers, small domes, and high stacks of chimneys curiously twisted and interlaced which, partially gilded by the rays of the setting sun, had something Moorish in their character. Against the brilliant sky rose the favourite bower of good Queen Mary, while the melancholy yew and dark green holly stood out in proud relief, from their glorious background.

Blanch and Lord Dalmaine leaned together on the iron balustrade that overhangs the river, and watched the changes of nature's lovely countenance, while a faint blush played round the horizon, and gradually settling into a rich warm glow, spread itself rapidly over the heavens.

“How sincerely,” exclaimed Lord Dalmaine, breaking a silence that was beginning to be painful, “do I pity those who are insensible to the pleasures of such a scene as this! How incomprehensible does it appear to me that any one can look with indifference upon the varied pages of the book of Nature!”

“I do not think there are many,” replied Blanch, “who regard any thing decidedly beautiful with an eye of utter indifference; but I am sure there are few, very few, who possess in its full extent the power of appreciating the calm but exquisite pleasures to which you allude.”

“I believe it to be a gift,” said Lord Dalmaine, “a precious gift, for the possession of which we should be deeply grateful.”

“Oh yes,” rejoined Blanch, “such a capability of enjoyment gives a wider range to existence, increases the means of happiness, and is in itself a blessing and a balm, requiring, I should conceive, a refined as well as a pure mind.”

“Do you think, then,” inquired her companion, not a little interested by the discussion, “that such feelings proceed altogether from the exercise of the intellect?”



“Certainly not altogether,” she replied; “the delight with which we are enabled to gaze on such a sky as this, or to examine the minuter perfections of a flower, appears to me a mingled exercise of brain and heart. Consequently it is more profound than that experienced by such as regard the same objects with the eye of scientific admiration only. Thus the artist may discuss the merits of the colouring, and the florist descant on the peculiarities of the plant, without deriving half that pleasure which has its source in feeling, and, in many instances, borders on emotion.”

“You are right,” rejoined Dalmaine, who listened with unfeigned attention; “and your explanation of the cause which expands the sense of enjoyment is in my opinion perfectly correct. This is perhaps the reason why women, generally speaking, are more enthusiastic admirers of nature than ourselves. They are never contented with any feeling from which the heart is excluded; and yet it would be difficult to define that link, which often connects the most dissimilar objects. Why should the page of nature, when it is one we peruse for the first time, refer us to the volume of our affec-

tions? Why should music, beautiful but unfamiliar, hurry us back to the recollection of those we love? Had two people loving each other, looked upon the same scene, or listened to melody side by side, no interpretation would be needed of the feelings of each when they look, or listen, alone. Why, for instance, should the act of gazing on such a scene as this, call up in an instant every form we love? Unless, indeed, the light which emanates from the face of nature pours at once into the brain and the heart, illuminating in the one all its host of thought and imagination, and like an electric flash, displaying all those bright images with which affection and memory have adorned the innermost recesses of the other."

"It may be so," replied his companion seriously; "but to me there is something in the very name of evening that appears devoted to reflection, and consecrated to every kindly and better feeling of our nature."

As she pronounced these words, Blanch felt uneasy at the confidential tone of the discourse, and instead of leading it gradually in another direction, she paused abruptly, and quickened her pace towards the palace.

“Do not be so cruel, Miss Courtenay,” said Lord Dalmaine, “as to bring a conversation, which has proved most interesting, to an end so suddenly as you sometimes think proper. Indeed if you believe me unworthy of listening, I may say of understanding your sentiments, you do me injustice.”

Blanch did not answer, for the tenderness of his manner alarmed her, and she knew not what to say; while Dalmaine, who watched every change of her countenance, on perceiving she was distressed, thus continued :

“You were talking of flowers, and I will gather that little cluster of my favourite lily of the valley, which is doubly fragrant at this sweet hour.”

Blanch could scarcely thank him, as she took the lilies from his hand; yet those flowers recalled ideas that were worth some gratitude. Oh, what a guide to memory is the perfume of a single flower! What power is there in its sweet breath to waft us back to other days! to check the gaiety, or increase the sadness of the moment, by colouring it with the hues of the past. Its fragrance is like some silken clue, leading us back through a labyrinth of years.

But to Blanch's imagination, the lily of the valley bore a message from William. It had ever been mixed with his sweet offerings, and appeared now to upbraid her for having even listened to or established the slightest bond of sympathy with another man, by discussing a matter of feeling when she could no longer doubt he regarded her with more than common interest. The tears that had been long restrained now forced themselves down her cheeks; the flowers dropped from her hand, and without a word she quitted Lord Dalmaine. Hurrying through the cloistered passages, Blanch gained her home, and finding that her parents were already returned, sent to excuse herself from reappearing that evening.

But Sir Philip and Lady Courtenay had another guest in Lord Dalmaine, who arrived shortly after, and with whom some interesting and important conversation ensued.

CHAPTER V.

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Is there not some mysterious instinct which has the power of warning us, when any thing relating to ourselves, or our nearest interests, is in agitation? If not, whence could the uneasiness arise which Blanch experienced, as she sat alone in her room, ignorant that Lord Dalmaine was at that moment with her parents? She had nothing to condemn herself for, as the conversation which had first taken place might, in fact, have passed between any two persons who possessed a similarity of taste and idea. Although she could not but perceive that Lord Dalmaine regarded her with admiration, yet, as we have before observed, he was most guarded in his attentions, and even had Blanch dreamed of the possibility of his making a formal proposal, she would have felt convinced that her conduct (par-

ticularly as regarded the flowers) was calculated rather to offend than encourage him.

But far different had been Lord Dalmaine's view of the case : the look that the thought of William had called up, the emotion, which the slightest association connected with his remembrance had the power of awakening, the sigh that could not be checked, the tear that could not be concealed, were all fondly attributed to another cause. Alas ! who can be blamed, for looking through that coloured lens which hope occasionally suspends before our eyes, investing the gloomy landscape with all the splendour of sunshine, even though contrast should render the reality more dreary, when the glittering medium is withdrawn ?

But to return to Blanch, she slept little, and, on rising the next morning, prepared herself for sundry questions and remarks, both on her absence the night before, and on her pale and distressed countenance. To her surprise and relief, the one was merely regretted and the other not hinted at ; yet there was something in the appearance of both her parents that inspired Blanch with a vague dread.

It was evident that something unusual had

occurred, and that Lady Courtenay was panting beneath the burden of a secret which she would fain have deposited, but for the admonitory glances of her husband. Sir Philip's whole countenance bore a character of subdued triumph of restrained exultation, and Blanch knew not why, but it seemed to concern her. Her uneasiness gradually increased, and could no longer be concealed, and yet it excited no surprise in either of her parents. She made her escape, as soon as it was possible, and seeking her little favourite retreat, began to occupy herself as usual, when a knock at the door startled her from her seat. Sir Philip entered, and taking a chair, placed himself exactly opposite.

“ You must forgive my intrusion, Blanch,” he said, “ for I come on a welcome errand, to quiet that little heart of yours, which shows its workings terribly in your telltale face. Although you thought proper to make your escape last night, lest the declaration which hung on your lover's lips should offend the nicety of your ear,—he has intrusted your father with the embassy, and deputed me to

lay his heart, hand, and every worldly possession at your feet.

As he spoke, Sir Philip purposely averted his eyes, lest he should increase his daughter's natural embarrassment; but he was not a little displeased when, in a voice that sounded quite unfamiliar to him, so changed was it by agitation, she replied, "I am sorry, very, very sorry, my dear father, that it is entirely out of my power to listen to Lord Dalmaine's proposals."

Sir Philip certainly did not expect such an answer; he had looked for an open confession of delight, and he therefore continued:—

"Do not, Blanch, make any of those useless and ridiculous answers, which are considered a point of etiquette on such occasions. You love Lord Dalmaine; and though you do not choose to own it by words, your agitation last night bespoke it plainly. He loves you; you have now been acquainted several months, and, during that time, thrown a great deal together; it does not require years for two young people well suited on all points to form an attachment. Therefore, my dear child, you may as well deal openly with your father, and confess the hap-



piness in which he shares. Had I the power of choosing a son-in-law, my choice would have fallen on Lord Dalmaine rather than any man I know in the world."

How wayward, how incomprehensible is human nature! The moment that Blanch had so long dreaded, at the bare thought of which she had shuddered, was at length arrived, but now a sudden and unaccountable courage animated her, as she replied;

"Do not suppose for a moment, my dear father, that my refusal is dictated by adherence to any foolish custom, it is the effect of mature reflection. I can only regret very much that my conduct should have been so far misconstrued by Lord Dalmaine; and even more, that you, my dear father, should desire any thing with which I cannot comply."

"Blanch," exclaimed her father, as he darted a look in which surprise and anger struggled for the mastery, "do you dare to trifle with me in this manner? Do you pretend to refuse the hand of one of the first nobles in England? a man of birth, fortune, and talents: one of our most rising peers; and a friend and favourite of his majesty?—It is impossible! You are

either mad or foolish; or do you carry this absurd jest so far merely to brave my anger?"

"Oh, no!" replied Blanch; "I have no such sinful intentions. I refuse the hand of Lord Dalmaine in all humility, in all gratitude for his preference;—but forgive me, my dear father,—oh! do not look so sternly on your poor child!—I am engaged to another, whose vows I had received before I ever knew that I was coming to England, or was acquainted with the existence of your friend." Blanch uttered the last part of the sentence in a faltering voice, and she bent her eyes on the ground; but the loud and blasphemous oath that burst from her father's lips, made her shudder more for him than for herself.

"And this," he exclaimed, "is the end of the obsequious duty, the hypocritical deference which you pay to your mother and myself; a continued course of duplicity towards those who have loaded you with kindness!"

"Oh, do not say so, my dear father," rejoined Blanch, in a tone of deprecation; "remember, before you condemn me, that for many years you allowed me to be absent; and that before I received your summons, I had

formed this attachment. Remember also, that neither you nor my mother have ever inquired into any particulars of my former life; and that the first moment it is necessary, I have told you the truth."

"And what beggarly foreigner," cried Sir Philip, "have you the audacity to compare with the high-born and wealthy Lord Dalmaine?"

"He is no foreigner," replied Blanch; "but has the merit of being born in the same island as yourself."

"His name and history?" insisted her father.

"His name," she replied, at once, "is William Clifford: he is an orphan who resides with his uncle in Italy, but has spent the last few years in travelling."

"This tells me nothing," continued Sir Philip: "to what county in England does his family belong? what is his fortune,—and his expectations?"

"I do not know," said Blanch, with more hesitation than before.

Sir Philip echoed her words, and then burst into a harsh laugh, adding;

“It may perhaps appear intrusive in me, if I inquire by what unaccountable exaggeration of self-sufficiency, this eligible suitor considers himself an adequate match for any daughter of mine?”

Blanch did not reply, and Sir Philip continued, in the same tone of sarcasm, “And where is this noble lover now, and when does he intend to claim his willing and expectant bride?”

“I do not know,” again exclaimed the poor girl in a voice of heartfelt sadness.

“Blanch Courtenay,” cried her father, “must I remind you, who you are? must I remind you of the name you bear, to show you in its true light the disgraceful engagement which you have formed with a man, who for all I know—for all you appear to know—may prove some low-born adventurer?”

She raised her head, she spoke once more unhesitatingly, while the blood of her noble ancestry mounted to her cheek and forehead.

“When you do remind me” she said, “of the name I bear, it must be to bid me remember that none who glory in that name should ever sully it by inconstancy and false-

hood. The engagement which I made with such a man as William Clifford, cannot be called shameful, but a breach of faith, an act of perjury, is as disgraceful, as it is wicked."

"And what," inquired Sir Philip, "what was there to love, or to inspire such constancy in a man who, by your own account, has nothing to recommend him, and in my opinion is some fugitive or outlaw from England? Answer me Blanch, what did you love in this William Clifford?"

"Himself!" she replied, while her eye fired at Sir Philip's contemptuous mention of her lover.

The workings of her father's countenance, during the short pause that ensued, were terrible for his daughter to witness. He had risen from his chair in the struggle of passion, and now dashing his clenched hand upon the table, he burst forth,

"I will have none of this Blanch! You must, you shall marry Lord Dalmaine."

"No! No!" she replied, "Never! Nothing can induce me to do so; I will never enter the sacred house of God, to pronounce a twofold perjury, to repay one man's affection by falsehood, and the other by treachery."

“Insolent and shameless girl!” cried Sir Philip, “beware how you exasperate me further, I will find means to compel your acquiescence, to force your consent.”

“There are no means of doing so,” replied his daughter, “neither do I think you would have the cruelty to attempt it; but, at all events, rather than enter into this hated contract, I would throw myself at the king’s feet and claim the protection of my country’s laws against an act of injustice and oppression.”

The fury of Sir Philip Courtenay was now at its height; but his tone was calm, though his eyes flashed. “Listen to me,” he said, “and be assured that although I speak in anger, I speak in earnest. Refuse Lord Dalmaine! and my doors are shut against you for ever.”

“I have no alternative then,” exclaimed the wretched Blanch, “but to return to my aunt’s roof at Bordeaux.”

“Do so,” he sternly replied, “you have my full consent, though you do not need that; do so, and beg your way on foot!”

As he spoke he darted one more fierce and angry glance at her, and left the room.

It was in a state of fearful agitation that

Lady Courtenay found her daughter, about half an hour after the interview with Sir Philip. Blanch was sitting in stupified silence, with her eyes fixed on the door, but no sooner did Lady Courtenay enter, than she rose and threw herself upon her bosom.

"Oh, my mother!" she said, "you will comfort me, you will advise me how to act!" Alas! Blanch forgot how incompetent a counsellor was the person she addressed.

Lady Courtenay was also much agitated, and the manner in which she addressed her daughter, was not calculated to sooth or pacify her. It appeared as if she considered Blanch as a child who had transgressed, and even while embracing her, Lady Courtenay accused her daughter of having acted improperly, ungratefully, and presumptuously towards her father: she was even more surprised than Sir Philip at Blanch's obstinacy; for the duty of complying with his wishes had never been questioned by her; the possibility of withstanding them never entered her head. Since their marriage, she had never seen her husband so angry, she trembled at the thoughts of it, and how a weak and helpless woman could brave a man's fury.

was to her perfectly incomprehensible. By Sir Philip's commands she bore a message to Blanch not to reappear until her determination was altered, or his made known.

There could scarcely exist a stronger contrast than that of the mother and daughter at this moment: there was a dignity even in the grief and agitation of Blanch, and the gentle resolution with which she listened to Lady Courtenay's pusillanimous arguments was no insignificant trait of her character. She found, indeed, there was no refuge in her mother's judgment or sympathy, for she had neither, and the poor girl therefore contented herself with answering respectfully, and entreating to be left alone, that she might compose her spirits. How does the first word of unkindness sear the heart that has only been familiar with affection! Blanch felt withered, crushed, overwhelmed. Neither did she know where to fly for advice. Dalmaine was the only person whom she believed capable of befriending her, and he was the last to whom she could have recourse in this, or, indeed, as matters now stood, in any other circumstance.

Something, however, it was necessary to do; William must be made acquainted with



her situation: he was in Paris, at least so she believed; but how to convey any intelligence to him was a matter of the greatest difficulty. Suddenly she remembered that Miss Bellenden, who had remained with the Princess of Wales at Hampton Court, had a relation at Paris, and that one day that young lady had asked if Blanch wished for any new fashions from the French metropolis, as she had constant communication with that city. To her, then, without any further preliminary, Blanch went, after having traced a few hasty lines to William Clifford. It was a point of great delicacy, but this was not a moment for scruples. Blanch found Miss Bellenden alone; and delivering the note, she told her, with all the composure she could command, that, if it were possible to discover the person to whom it was addressed, and to obtain an answer, her obligation would be unbounded.

Her manner, even more than her words, convinced the kind-hearted girl of the importance she attached to the mission. She thanked Blanch for the confidence she had shown in her willingness to serve her or any one in distress, addressed to her some words of kindness, with-

out venturing upon inquiry, or displaying the slightest curiosity; and from that day the two girls became constant companions.

However unhappy was the situation of Blanch, it was far preferable to the conflicting and perturbed state of Sir Philip's mind. To have been thwarted by a woman, and that woman his own daughter, was in itself sufficient to rouse all the anger of his proud nature. But when it was his darling project that she thwarted, when a word from the lips of a young girl had power to raze his fabric of ambition to the ground, his fury knew no bounds.

He felt that every moment was precious; and dreading the arrival of Lord Dalmaine before he had prepared his own line of conduct, he gave strict orders that no one should be admitted.

In sending Lady Courtenay to Blanch, he did not reckon much upon the power of her reasoning, but he fondly hoped that she might inspire her daughter with some of her own timidity, by assuring Blanch that her father's threats were uttered in earnest. But on the failure of the mission, Sir Philip determined to pursue another course, and, for the first time he condescended to admit Lady Cour-

tenay to his confidence. To her, indeed, he did not attempt to describe the feelings of anger, almost amounting to hatred, which Blanch's conduct had inspired. Next to the desire of self-aggrandizement, which was connected in his mind with Dalmaine's alliance, there was now an anxiety to mortify, to humble, nay to be revenged, upon his own daughter. These sentiments, however, were wisely confined to the genial atmosphere of his own bosom; for he was well aware that, though his wife might not openly combat, or condemn them, it was not in her nature to participate in any thing so cruel and unnatural. To her, then, he spoke of Blanch in a far different mood—rather in compassion than anger—as an erring, misguided child, whose ill-conducted education and ridiculous notions formed her only excuse.

He might, he said, perhaps blame himself, for having allowed her to remain so long with his sister, who was in no way calculated to regulate the mind of any young person;—while, to the unspeakable gratification of Lady Courtenay, he assured her of his belief, that had Blanch benefited by her example, she

would never have behaved in the disrespectful and unfeminine manner, which had provoked his anger.

“Still,” continued the wily hypocrite, taking his wife’s hand, “she is our child, Catherine, and her resemblance to yourself, must ever make her dear to me, let us then both combine to eradicate this foolish sentiment by gentle means, and pave the way to a happy union with Lord Dalmaine. To effect this we must act with prudence, both by him and Blanch. Do you now go to the latter, and tell her from me that, providing she will receive him on the same footing, as before his proposal, I will endeavour to forget her past conduct, and will not urge her any further on the subject. You can tell her if you please, that I have now known Lord Dalmaine for many years, and I will suffer no child of mine, to make a breach between us, nor would I expose him to the ridicule of the world, by having it openly shown that she has rejected him.”

Lady Courtenay, who at that moment, was all glowing with the recollection of Sir Philip’s affectionate speeches, and with the pride of being

considered worthy of his confidence, proceeded to her daughter's room, and returned shortly after with the following message:

“Blanch has charged me with her duty. She thanks you for your promised forgiveness, and will do as you require, on condition that Lord Dalmaine be made acquainted with her engagement to another, and informed that she receives him as a friend, and not as a lover.”

Lady Courtenay found a stumblingblock to their plan in this reply, but not so the wary Sir Philip. That very evening he had an interview with Dalmaine, on whose generous frankness he easily imposed.

Blanch, he said, was an only child, of a timid nature, who had never been called upon to act for herself, or to decide on any important point. Such a crisis in her fate apparently alarmed her, and although she returned Lord Dalmaine's affection, and was grateful for his preference, it was her wish to remain a few months longer under her paternal roof.

“I am almost ashamed my lord,” continued the practised dissembler, “to subject you to such caprices, but my daughter's happiness must ever be my first consideration, and al-

though I can scarcely hope that you will conform to her peculiar fancies, it is my duty to lay the truth before you, and to request from her, that you will not address her for the present in the language of love, or ever mention or even allude to the tacit engagement which will be understood to subsist between you. On this condition alone, will that wayward child of mine, listen to the proposals with which you have honoured her and me."

"Rather than relinquish the hope of your daughter's hand," exclaimed Lord Dalmaine, "I would conform to even more distressing conditions than these; but as I am not allowed to advocate my own cause, I must trust to you, Sir Philip, to do so for me, and shorten, if possible, the time of probation"

"You may depend on me," replied the other, "to hasten, by every means in my power, the dearest object of my ambition; but let me impress upon your mind, that any precipitancy would at once destroy our mutual hopes; and above all, that your engagement must be kept a profound secret."

"Unaccountable girl!" cried Dalmaine; "she must be well aware of the influence

which she possesses over me, to exact such conditions; but I have no alternative; it shall be as she wishes; you may tell her so from me; but add also, that I trust she will have some consideration for the sacrifice I am making, some regard for the peculiar situation in which she has placed me: at least, I may hope that her manner and conversation will repay me in some measure."

"Do not doubt it," said Sir Philip, grasping the young man's hand, while the satisfaction which the success of his scheme inspired, passed for pleasure and gratitude; "there are few joys," he added, "greater than that which a parent experiences, in trusting the happiness of a beloved child to one for whom his admiration and respect are unbounded."

They parted; and Sir Philip, rejoicing in his successful deceit, repaired to Lady Courtenay, to inform her of what had passed, and to instruct her on many points in which she could materially assist him. Edified by her husband's list of the motives which actuated him, she listened with servile deference; and, beguiled into the belief that they were working for the ultimate good of their child, Lady

Courtenay acceded without a scruple to the deep-laid plot.

On the other hand, Blanch, whose kindly nature shrank from any further dispute, and whose pure mind could never have imagined the baseness of her parents' conduct, was happy in being once more reconciled to them, and grateful that all thoughts of the marriage were put aside. She, moreover, fancied that she understood her father's delicacy with regard to Lord Dalmaine, and was only surprised that he himself could find any pleasure in the friendship of one whose love he had solicited in vain. She sometimes believed, indeed, that her father, and perhaps Lord Dalmaine himself, had calculated on the probability of her changing her mind on further acquaintance ; but she did nothing which could encourage such a hope, and in the mean time consoled herself with the belief that there was every chance of William's soon receiving the letter she had addressed to him.



CHAPTER VI.

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AMONG the many proverbs with which the followers of David's wise son have kindly provided that part of the community who love better to clothe their ideas in ready-made language, than to select and adapt the materials which their own wits supply, none is in more general use than the homely adage of "most haste worst speed." Nevertheless, it may still remain a problem, perhaps yet to be solved, whether impatience, by sharpening the edge of observation, causes us to remark and overestimate those hinderances which might pass unnoticed were we not hurried, or whether stumblingblocks really start up with cruel pertinacity, merely to thwart our eagerness. Be this as it may, few will deny that an accumula-

tion of trifling annoyances is less easily borne than a single but powerful opposition. The same man, who, armed with a good weapon and a stout heart, might stretch the fiercest beast of prey at his feet, becomes a victim to the tormenting stings of insects, singly too small for more than a moment's attention. The horseman, when hurrying towards a wished-for goal, seldom permits a casual obstacle to impede his progress ; giving the rein to the noble animal beneath him, with a resolute application of whip or spur, he clears the barrier at a bound. But the case is more desperate, when his path lies over uneven ground, and where a thousand stones and ruts disturb the equability of the horse's pace, and gives his impatient rider only the choice of a steady walk, or a stumbling gallop.

In such a manner was William Clifford's anxiety to leave Paris, thwarted on every side.

Shortly after his arrival in the French metropolis, he had again written to his uncle, but in a more decided tone than before. He detailed Madame D'Aubry's account of her brother's overbearing and ambitious character ; he mentioned the reports which had already reached

him, of the admiration which Blanch had excited at the English court, and his belief that her situation, in consequence, must be one of greater sorrow and difficulty even than his own. He must, he said, earnestly entreat the chevalier, to make some final arrangement, or, at least, make known his intentions with regard to settlements, that he (William) might go to England, and claim his bride ; a proceeding which, in the present uncertain state of affairs, it would be madness to dream of. The style of William Clifford's letter was firm, but respectful and affectionate; for, although he considered his uncle's conduct, of late, harsh, he was not one of those who consider a single act sufficient to cancel the debt of whole years of kindness.

Many weeks elapsed without any answer from the chevalier, and when it arrived, there was little satisfaction to be derived from his reply. It was kindly written, but bore the marks of evident indecision : the writer assured his nephew, that he would take the matter into due consideration, and let him know the result shortly ; but he went on to beg him at the same time to defer his journey to England until he received a second letter. There was a cause

for this request ; the kind-hearted old man concealed a painful truth, and with a want of selfishness, rare in any age, but even more so in advanced life, he wished to spare William the scene of another deathbed, so shortly after that of General de Brissac. Well aware that his health was rapidly declining, the Chevalier Clifford still sought to maintain, until his latest hour, the consistency which had characterized his whole life.

Such were his feelings ; but, to William, his letter seemed strange, especially as it contained precisely the same injunction that had been given him at Bordeaux, by Dumont. “ Could there be any connexion between them ? ” he asked himself ; and, as he thus thought, he determined to make one vigorous effort to see the prisoner, and for that purpose to tell all that he had hitherto concealed to the Baronne de Bernay, whose great influence he could not doubt. His request for an interview was immediately granted, and Mirabel pressed him eagerly to tell her what was the cause of all the anxiety which she could not help perceiving.

By this time William sufficiently understood the character of Mirabel, to be sensible that

she deserved the confidence she had solicited, and he consequently determined to withhold no part of the truth. She listened with profound attention, while he described the accidental meeting with General de Brissac, and subsequent acquaintance with Dumont. She evinced a sincere interest in the friendship which he had formed with that extraordinary man, and appeared to take great delight in hearing Clifford dwell upon some of the noble feelings which the prisoner had expressed. There was, however, one part of the communication for which she waited impatiently; but Clifford mentioned the name of every person in Bordeaux, connected with his narrative, before he could bring himself to speak of Blanch. He tried to pronounce that name carelessly at first, still it was uttered unlike any other word, for William was but a poor dissembler, and Mirabel shuddered as she heard the name of her rival for the first time. Why, she knew not, but a dead weight seemed to fall upon her, a redoubled sense of desolation overpowered her, and yet she heard nothing new, nothing worse than she had before known. What could it be to her, that the chosen bride

of William Clifford was an Englishwoman, or that she was called Blanch?—what difference could name or country make in such a case?

Strange, however, was the effect it had upon her mind; for until this moment, to Mirabel's imagination it seemed impossible to penetrate a sort of vague uncertainty which concealed her rival. Now, however, she had seen her portrait, she had heard her name and history, and all the ideas connected with Blanch assumed as it were, a tangible form. She drew William into the description of that eventful evening, when he plighted his vows, and received those of Blanch Courtenay in exchange; and although he frequently checked the expression of the feelings which such a conversation necessarily renewed, there was enough of enthusiasm, in the look and tone, to inflict fresh pangs on the heart of his hearer; and yet she listened in silence, striving to conceal from the view of him she still so deeply loved, the sorrow that his narrative awakened. Once, indeed, she ventured to ask him, what obstacles could possibly tend to defer the union, which was mutually agreed upon; and William had a difficult task in affording her a partial

elucidation of the mystery. He would not disclose all the circumstances connected with his uncle's exile and attainder, because he felt that he had no right to do so ; but he gave her to understand, that the delay related to family arrangements, about which there was much difficulty ; he expected ere long, he said, to receive an answer from Italy, where his relative resided, and in the mean time, he entreated Mirabel, to assist him in discovering Dumont's retreat.

“ You may, perhaps,” he said, “ accuse me of weak credulity in putting any faith in such mysterious words as those he addressed to me on his departure.— Do not go to England until you have seen me again, I may perhaps assist you in the dearest object of your ambition.—I will own that it is beyond my comprehension how a prisoner and a Frenchman can have any influence in such a case ; but still, baronne, had you ever heard him speak, had you ever conversed with him for any space of time together, I feel sure that you would be inclined to place the same implicit trust in Dumont as I have ever done.”

“ Nor do I doubt it,” she replied. “ I love to trust ; but, oh ! how seldom can I do so !

I thank you, William, for this last proof of your kindness, and I firmly believe it will lay in my power, to do as you wish on this occasion. From the dates which you mention, and from several circumstances which I now remember, I feel almost certain that the prisoner in question lies even now in Vincennes. The regent, wary as he is on such subjects, does not refrain sometimes from alluding to them in my presence, being well aware of the abhorrence in which I have ever held politics. The reputation that I have gained in this way, will now be of the utmost advantage, for his highness will never suspect me of any sinister views to his government, and consequently our purpose will be more speedily effected. Wait, therefore, with all the patience you can command, until you hear from me on the subject; and do not doubt but that I will set to work speedily in your behalf."

William Clifford expressed his gratitude, and they parted; nor was the wished-for opportunity long in presenting itself.

It happened a few mornings after the above-mentioned conversation, that the baronne was attending the levée of her royal mistress, when



the duke, in high good-humour, entered the room, to rally his royal consort on her indolence.

The duchess was at that instant employed in spreading several layers of rouge upon her cheeks, one of the few offices in which she refused all assistance, a sight that provoked her husband's gaiety all the more.

"Do me a kindness," he cried, laughing; "call the Baronne de Bernay from before that long glass, in which she must have seen her pretty self a hundred times, and bestow a little of that blooming colour upon her cheeks, where the lilies have of late sadly predominated. Do madame," he continued, as the duchess looked up from the mirror with an offended air; "I am sure you have enough to spare."

"Her royal highness," exclaimed Mirabel, stepping forward with a good humour that enchanted the duke all the more from his expecting some tart reply; "her royal highness, has granted me permission to try the effect of country air on these pallid cheeks, which, as you are pleased to insinuate, bear evidence to

the late hours, and dissipated lives we have all led of late."

"And if I were the duchess," replied the regent, "I would hear of no such vain excuse for idleness; and at all events, limit your leave to a very few days."

"Pshaw! Philip," observed the duchess, in a drawling tone, which she meant to be sarcastic, "you know, as well as I do, that the baronne must always have her own way, and that asking my leave is a matter of mere form."

"It seemed not the other night at the masquerade," whispered the regent to Mirabel; and then continued aloud, "And if it be not presumptuous, to which convent is this zealous recluse bound?"

"To my own humble chateau, near Vincennes, monseigneur," replied the baronne; "and now that I think of it, I would ask a boon of your highness, which I trust you will hear favourably."

"Oh, ho!" exclaimed the regent, laughing outright; "methought this sweet meekness, this submissive language, would lead to some-

thing of the kind; but let us hear it, pretty one!”

“Nay, monseigneur,” rejoined the baronne, affecting to be offended, “I am too proud to present a vain suit.”

“In good sooth, for pride, the first angel that fell might yield to the Baronne de Bernay,” continued Philip; “but let me hear the request, and it shall be granted. if it were only to smooth that ruffled brow.”

“Your highness may recollect,” Mirabel began, “some time ago, giving me a pass to visit a distant relation of my father’s, who is imprisoned in the Donjon de Vincennes; he is extremely poor, and, although in many respects unworthy, I cannot allow a De Bernay, to want for any thing. It is now more than a year since I saw him, and as I shall remain in the neighbourhood several days, your highness would greatly oblige me by repeating the act of kindness, and allowing me to visit my unfortunate kinsman, and inquire into his necessities. I am aware that the favour is a great one; but your highness knows that there

is no danger, in admitting so poor a politician as myself, within those terrible walls."

"I know, on the contrary, that you are the arrantest little diplomatist I ever had to deal with," replied the regent, "and that it is useless attempting to cope with you. The pass shall be made out in due form, and forwarded to your hotel. You would not care much, I fancy, to see your cousin at liberty, or by heavens I would not trust you in Vincennes! The gaolers themselves would do any thing for such a smile as that."

"Would they so, monseigneur," said Mirabel "then I must carry a fixed scowl upon my brow, or we shall have our good city of Paris overrun with more reprobates than ever. I almost wish you had not informed me of the power of a single smile; I shall be so curious to know if the prison doors would indeed fly open at the movement of my lips."

"And curious, moreover," rejoined the regent, "to subject the Duke of Orleans to one trial, while he brings you to another, and see whether justice or weakness would be his first

councillor on the occasion—in a word, to discover if he would bring that pretty head to the block, and deliver over that snowy throat, to the sharp embrace of the headman's axe."

"When I incur the penalty of the law, monseigneur," replied the baronne, with mock solemnity, "I trust that I shall have sufficient resolution to meet my fate without putting your highness's clemency to the slightest test."

"By Heaven! I believe it," rejoined the duke; "you would die, if it were only to deprive me of the pleasure of signing your pardon."

Mirabel smiled and courtseyed to the duke and duchess, entreating that the former would not limit his permission to a single visit, then taking leave of the royal pair, she drove to her own hotel immediately.

## CHAPTER VII.

WHILE Mirabel was thus actively employed in his service, Clifford was awaiting the result of her efforts with the greatest impatience.

In the afternoon of the day in question, he was sitting at home, in expectation of a summons, when a youth was ushered into the room, in whom William had no difficulty in recognising Armand, the baronne's page and foster-brother, although he had laid aside the rich livery in which he usually appeared. He was the bearer of a note, which was brief but satisfactory, and ran as follows :—

“All prospers—meet me to-morrow morning (well disguised) at the entrance of the small park,

about eight o'clock. I mention this early hour, that you may return to Paris before your absence has been remarked. Appear at court to-night! Let every one see you there! M. DE B."

Clifford wrote a few hasty lines of acknowledgment, and intrusted them to the messenger, while he obeyed Mirabel's injunctions, and proceeded to pay his devoirs that night at the palace. On his return, he found a large packet containing letters, awaiting him, the outer cover of which was written by a friend of the Chevalier Clifford's, whose death it announced. It was couched in feeling terms, giving several details that were most valuable to William, and enclosing the papers with which the chevalier had entrusted the writer on his death-bed. With sincere grief William broke the seal of that letter which bore his uncle's handwriting,—it was evidently traced by a feeble and shaking hand; but the contents were as consolatory as circumstances could allow. The chevalier thanked his nephew for the duty and affection he had ever manifested, and rejoiced, for William's sake, that he was spared the repetition of so painful a scene as that of a death-bed.

“ I die,” continued the writer, “ in the faith I have ever professed, and in the allegiance for which I have suffered ; on both these points we have differed, but it has been in silence, and, believe me, your generous forbearance on all subjects has not been lost upon me.”

He then proceeded to give directions relative to the presentation of a memorial (referring to the title and estates) by which the letter was accompanied, and concluded with blessings on William and his future bride, and an affecting and eternal farewell.

William spent the night in perusing the memorial, and in weighing his claims in his own mind, claims on which perhaps depended the possession of one who was, in his sight far, far above every worldly advantage ; but as he once more perused the letter of his affectionate relative, he almost blamed himself for not feeling his loss more acutely. And yet he did feel it, and as the recollection of his second father, rose vividly before him, fancy led him step by step, over the whole track of his short, but eventful life. In such moments as these, memory will call all her wonderful powers



into action, and many remembrances connected with his early childhood, which had long lain dormant in William's bosom, were now awakened. The last smile of his beautiful mother, the caresses of his father, their English home, which was now occupied by strangers, or levelled with the ground, rose up before him,—all those calm but sweet delights that beam upon our happy childhood, before we leap the gulph of experience, before the head is bowed beneath the weight of disappointment and sorrow, or the heart becomes a prey to the insatiable host of feeling and passion, engendered by itself.

Turning from the past, he dwelt upon the prospect of Vincennes, and upon the possibility of seeing Dumont once again. When he recollected the prisoner, he could not help comparing him with the courtiers of the regent, and he asked himself if such superiority could walk the same earth as those with whom he had lately associated. Thoughts of Blanch, too, who might so soon be his, anxiety for the devoted Mirabel, and doubts as to the success of their mutual enterprise, chased each other in

succession through his mind. The current indeed was troubled, but still the thoughts of William Clifford were blessed, for the certainty of Blanch's affection was to him a haven of calm but blissful repose, to which he could ever direct the course of his reflections.

He stood by the window and watched with anxiety the first glimmer of the morning, and, eager for an excuse to depart, judged it best to leave Paris before he could be observed. Accordingly he arranged the disguise on which he had determined with great precision, and found it difficult to recognise himself when he walked up to the large mirror that adorned his principal apartment. His hair was of a different colour, and the elevation of his large military boots added several inches to his stature.

The morning was grey, cold and raw, a drizzling mist scarcely permitted him to discover the road, and there was something in the aspect of every object, that appeared to speak of frustration and failure.

William rode on, sometimes quickening, sometimes slackening his pace, but arriving long before the time of rendezvous, he waited

upwards of two dreary hours at the entrance of the Park of Beauty, still so called from the Chateau de Beauté, that once stood in the midst, and was a favourite retreat of the French monarchs. Charles the Seventh had bestowed this castle upon Agnes Sorel, surnamed *La Belle des Belles*, a woman whose disinterested affection and noble patriotism, seemed to have fitted her, for a better fate. The motive assigned for this royal gift, was to endow his favourite with a possession from which she might derive an appropriate title, and in consequence she was called the *Lady of Beauty* until her death.

Here William waited, gazing into the park ; but at length he heard the clattering of horses' hoofs along the hard road, and in a few moments perceived Mirabel followed by two pages, advancing at full speed. She wore the same dress as on their first meeting, while, on one shoulder was fastened the small insignia of office, then worn by the ladies of the court. She greeted William calmly, and her voice and manner were perfectly composed, but there was a fire in

her eye, and a flush on her cheek, which told her resolution, was that of excitement.

Causing her attendants to fall back, she rode leisurely by William's side in the direction of the donjon, and thus addressed him :

"You will be guided by what I say to the commandant ; I need not enjoin caution,—for my sake, at least, you will be prudent : this enterprise is one of more danger, than you perhaps imagine."

"I know it, generous Mirabel," replied William, "I feel how selfishly I am at this moment acting, but even now it is not too late to recede."

"Oh, no, William," said his companion, gently but earnestly, "you wrong me, if you believe that fear would ever deter Mirabel de Bernay from serving a friend ; but say no more, lest you destroy the self-possession which has cost me many hours to attain, or rather, unless you have any thing to ask, or communicate, do not speak to me until it is over—your voice has a strange effect upon me." She paused, and added timidly, "I will not ask you to be silent on our return."

By this time, they had arrived at the chateau which stood on one side of the tower, and was appropriated, with the garden adjoining, to the commandant of the prison. Avoiding this building, however, they rode up to the principal entrance of the donjon, where Mirabel delivered a small note addressed to the governor, who, in a few moments, hastened to the spot. Receiving the baronne with marked respect, he assisted her to dismount, and, leading the way, conducted Mirabel, and Clifford, within the precincts of this far-famed prison.

The baronne refused, with courtesy, his invitation to enter the chateau, assuring him that her time was precious, and then, with many preliminaries, she proceeded to display the regent's pass for her admission, and to explain the reason for which she had obtained it, and thus continued:

“My steward, who is better able than myself, to ascertain the real state of my cousin's pecuniary affairs, will, with your permission, perform the errand in my stead, while I await its result in the little chapel, which I once before visited on a similar occasion.”

“But, madam,” replied the governor, bowing low, and smiling sweetly as he spoke, “his Highness of Orleans has not specified the name of the unfortunate—I should rather say, the fortunate prisoner, who claims the honour of being allied to the Baronne de Bernay.”

“Ah, monsieur!” exclaimed Mirabel, with forced gaiety, “I know very well that state prisoners have so many titles, that their own relatives may well be at a loss. But my father’s cousin was once called Dumont, and arrived here from Bourdeaux, having made the Fort du Ha his residence for some time in ——, I have no head for these matters,—what was the month?” she inquired, turning to Clifford.

“Last May, as well as I can recollect, madam,” he replied. The governor’s countenance fell. “And you said, madam, that this gentleman was to be admitted instead of yourself?”

“To speak the truth, monsieur,” said the baronne, “my kinsman and I, are better friends apart, and, though willing to serve, I am unwilling to see him. My steward must, therefore,

stand my proxy, and, with your permission, he may now be conducted to the cell, while I take my way to the chapel, where he will find me on his return."

She spoke in a certain and decided tone, and the governor having once more inspected the regent's order, summoned the gaoler, and, offering his arm to the baronne, conducted her to the chapel. With a pertinacious civility, which Mirabel did not dare discourage, he tormented her with a long and detailed account of all the curiosities and particularities of this little oratory. To her relief, however, he was at length called away upon business, and she was left to the society of her own reflections.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE sacred building in which Mirabel stood had been founded by Charles the Fifth, and dedicated to the Holy Trinity and the blessed Virgin, but that monarch did not live to witness its completion. His successors, however, continued to regard the chapel of Vincennes with due consideration, and transported thither many valuable relics, amongst which was a large metallic bason, brought from the east by some pious crusaders, that had frequently served as a baptismal font, for the royal children of France. The interior of the chapel, which was purely gothic, had ever been admired for its graceful architecture, the ceiling was richly ornamented, and the painted windows (the work of Jean Cousin) were justly celebrated for their



brilliancy. Mirabel paced up and down the aisle, endeavouring to compose her mind; which she found a sadly difficult task, for her imagination followed William into the prisoner's cell, while fancy ran forward, and traced the consequences of all she had done for him. She thought upon his departure, which might soon take place—she pictured to herself the meeting with her he loved, and then Mirabel's proud heart, as if willing to increase its own sorrow, dwelt upon the moment when William would relate to his bride, all that passed during their separation. Pausing, and meditating, she took a painful pleasure in dwelling upon every anticipation, scanning minutely all that William might tell to Blanch, were he so inclined; how Mirabel de Bernay had loved him, unwooed, while the happy and triumphant Blanch would exult in the power of her memory, over the affections of Clifford. At the thought of her rival, Mirabel worked up her imagination, until she fancied more than was probable; she saw Blanch listening in silent pride to her lover's narrative—she beheld the smile of scorn, and heard the chilling tone in which the severe

Englishwoman pronounced her name, classing her, perhaps, with things too light to speak of. And William too, would he forget her and all she had done—ay, and would still do for him? or would he remember her only with cold compassion by the side of one he loved, mentioning her name with pity, or hushing it altogether, lest it should offend the delicacy of Blanch's ear? At the picture thus presented the fiery blood of her mother flamed through her heart: Then suddenly burst forth again upon her soul, that stream of fearful passion which William's presence had lately quelled; then came the thirst of revenge, the flash of deadly hatred towards her unconscious rival; together with a thousand quick and stirring thoughts,—cruel gratification at the sorrow which William's absence must occasion,—fierce hopes of the effect that separation and all its thousand chances might produce, and presumptuous murmurs against the justice of Heaven.

“Oh, my God!” she cried in bitterness of spirit, “why am I denied that happiness which falls to the lot of thousands? Why, why am I the sport of those feelings with which thou hast

endowed me? Oh, rather let them become changeable and evanescent as the world in which I live: let them every day, every hour, be fixed upon a new object, or centred all in self! Then, then, at least, I shall be happy; then I shall imbibe the spirit of the air I breathe;—regret and memory will be lulled to eternal sleep, and my heart, yielding up its weight of fidelity, will become vain and empty, but light and buoyant as the gossamer that dances in the sunbeam!”

She paused, and clasped her hands together, until the veins swelled beneath the pressure. She groaned aloud, and the silence that reigned through the little chapel appeared to mock her grief. But when passion had in some measure subsided, a new change came over her.

Since her fatal attachment to Clifford, Mirabel had been familiar with sorrow; but there are many links in misery's chain, and latterly the noble spirit of devotion and self-command which had actuated her, brought with it a balm to her wounded feelings. Loving virtue and excellence as she did, Mirabel now quickly

became sensible of the extent of her error, in tempting the wrath of heaven by vain repinings ; and the fierce and ungentle thoughts which she could not quell, became hateful to her, almost while she indulged in them.

She paused before the high altar, and hardly conscious where she stood, lifted her eyes to the painting which adorned it. It was an "Ecce homo," the work of the matchless Guercino, whose pencil, dipped in the colouring of a pious heart, has gone farther towards portraying the incorporation of the divine and human nature, than any other which has attempted the awful subject. It were, indeed, a hard and callous heart, that could look unmoved upon that picture—on the heavy, yet still beaming eye, the parted lips, the bleeding brow—that brow which God had stamped with the seal of majesty, and man, impious and profane, had lacerated with the insulting mockery of a painful crown—dignity in suffering, heroism in resignation, and sublimity in meekness !

As Mirabel gazed upon the painting, a sudden stream of radiance burst through the gothic

window, chequering the pavement with many a brilliant and variegated hue, and falling in full, pure light upon the blessed features, of the Son of God. To the wounded and irritated feelings of the sufferer, that sudden ray, which, piercing the gloom of a wintry sky, fell in clear splendour upon the sacred picture—to Mirabel it appeared a messenger of promise, of peace and consolation,—her heart melted—thoughts of early piety, of youthful pleasure in the act of pure devotion, stole sweetly over her mind, like a soft and cooling wind over some burning and arid desert, reviving, refreshing, and renovating in its progress. She sank upon her knees, she leaned upon the balustrade of the altar, and poured forth her soul in supplication, striving to purify it of earthly feelings, and to turn her thoughts towards the Hope that fails not. Earnestly, sincerely, and solemnly did Mirabel pray, until the blessed consolation of tears, “the lovely dew” of the heart, was granted her. She lifted her streaming eyes to the picture before her; she remembered that he had wept at the tomb of Lazarus. She thought of her brother; of that

beloved brother, with whom her first prayers had been uttered—Gaspard who was now a heavenly spirit! Her heart was opened—her feelings changed. Anger, revenge, and jealousy were drowned in the effusion of new hopes; and in her humble solicitations yet one more being was remembered—Mirabel prayed for her whom William loved; she prayed that she might be blessed; that she might prove worthy of such love as his. She restrained her words, she wished, but she did not pray for death—but she prayed for rest—rest of spirit.

As she thus mingled supplication and thought together, she heard a light step behind her; and a voice pronounced her name gently—a voice that thrilled to her inmost heart, even while it checked her tears.

“I feared you were waiting for me, Mirabel,” said William, “and did not know how sadly you had been employed.”

“Oh, not sadly!” she replied, “happily, blissfully; but let us go, you have much to tell me, and even in this holy sanctuary we are not secure from the treachery of man.”

She took one more long look on the picture, as if to impress it on her memory, and then, with a heart overflowing with gratitude, she left the prison. Of the commandant, who treated her with obsequious attention, she then took leave, recommending her kinsman to his notice, and intimating the possibility of her return on the same errand: after which, she mounted her horse, and rode off hastily, accompanied by William and her two attendants. Having then proceeded for some way in silence, she checked her pace, and turning to Clifford, inquired what had been the success of his visit.

“ I had much trouble,” he said, “ with the gaoler who was intrusted with my guidance to Dumont’s cell, for he was both old and infirm, and, as I afterwards found, churlish withal; I suppose he discovered my impatience, for he appeared to have a peculiar delight in leading me through interminable corridors, at the slowest possible pace, informing me, as we went along, that I must make the most of my

time, for the commandant had no particular fancy for prolonged interviews ; at last, however, we stopped before a small low door, which had the number affixed to it, mentioned by the governor. As the gaoler commenced his task of unlocking and unbolting, he examined my countenance in a way that was not calculated to increase my predilection for him ; but, finding that his tardiness could elicit no murmurs from me, the cross-grained old man, at length opened the door, and half thrusting me in, told me he would return in half an hour. The transition from daylight to almost utter darkness prevented me, at first, from perceiving any object, and it was not until I had shaded my eyes with my hand, that I could benefit by the glimmering light of an iron lamp that was suspended from the vaulted roof. A small table, on which lay some untasted and uninviting food, a miserable bed, and broken chair, were the only articles of furniture which met my eye. But in the centre of the dungeon stood its noble inmate, his arms folded on his breast, and his eye fixed on me,



with an expression of surprise, but perfect calmness. I could not speak at first, but I advanced a few paces, and then the voice, whose equal I have never heard, demanded, in its calmest tone, "To what cause may I attribute the unusual appearance of a stranger?"

"Is it so long," I asked, "since we met that you can apply such an epithet to me?"

I once told you, Mirabel, how great is his self-command, and even at this moment he said but little. Yet his countenance expressed the welcome of his heart.

"William Clifford!" he exclaimed, as he approached and embraced me tenderly. "I little looked for this; I fancied you could not, or you would not find me. Come under the lamp, it is long since I have seen a human face. You are indeed the same," he added, smiling, "though that disguise is admirable; your whole figure is changed, and you appear as tall as myself."

"I am glad of it, Dumont," I replied, "then my purpose will be answered, for in that dress you shall one day leave the Donjon of Vincennes."

“ Good God !” cried Mirabel, “ what have you done ?”

“ Wrong !” answered William ; “ ungenerously perhaps by you, and rashly by myself. But you must forgive me ; before I ever dreamed that you would be instrumental in procuring this meeting I had sworn to deliver Dumont from prison.”

“ And have you,” rejoined the baronne, in a low and tremulous voice, “ have you calculated on all the difficulties and dangers attending such an enterprise.”

“ I have,” replied her companion, “ and find none of sufficient magnitude to dissuade me from my purpose. There is only one thing upon earth that can prevent my attempting Dumont’s rescue. If you withhold your consent, Mirabel, it is needless to say I must relinquish it ; but let me assure you that you need not be implicated in the affair ; should my scheme fail, I will leave you in possession of a letter that will go to prove I made use of the pass with which you had intrusted me to visit another person, and you cannot, therefore, pos-

sibly incur any blame, except in the imprudence of allowing any one else to execute your commission."

"I was not thinking of myself," replied Mirabel, sadly; "selfish fears, William Clifford, had no share in my thoughts; but tell me, how did Dumont receive the proposition?"

"I told him much in a few words; I combated his scruples, and obtained his promise; and the next time I enter the dungeon of Vincennes, it will be to remain in his stead."

Mirabel heard the rash project in speechless terror; for she knew by Clifford's calm and resolute manner, that his determination was fixed. She listened to his scheme; she gave him some valuable counsels; but the trials to which she was to be subjected this day, were not yet at an end. Clifford told her that he had entreated Dumont to explain the promise intimated in his note, and that the prisoner then assured him that he possessed secret influence with the court of England, which would be glad to conciliate him by granting a request that would cost it so little, as the

restoration of the Clifford estates. William then informed the baronne of his uncle's death, and that it now only remained for him to procure the release of Dumont, who would convey the papers to England, whither he proposed following immediately, should his scheme prove successful.

“ This day week,” he said, “ is fixed for the attempt ; and if you will intrust me with the pass, and plead indisposition as an excuse for not accompanying me, I do not think that any danger can accrue.”

Mirabel smiled sadly ; but her feelings were too deep, her resolution too firm, to speak of her intentions, and she therefore merely replied,

“ We will, if you please, meet this day week, at the same hour, on the same spot. I will procure a conveyance for Dumont as far as the coast ; and you, in the mean while, will obtain a passport for yourself, and take leave of the regent. But now, William, we must soon part, and perhaps we may never have another opportunity of conversing together ;

for the next time we meet, nothing must be touched upon that is likely to unnerve the mind. If not for my sake, at least for the sake of Blanch Courtenay, let prudence guide you in this perilous undertaking. I have a melancholy foreboding, that is but too often the forerunner of evil." Mirabel hesitated, and drawing the glove off her beautiful hand, she took a ring from her finger. "Do not refuse to accept this," she said; "it will bind you to nothing but to provide for your own safety. My cipher and lozenge are engraven upon the stone; and should you at any time, in the execution of this scheme, be in danger or difficulty, send me that ring, and if it be in the power of mortal I will save you."

William took the ring, and as he did so, he raised the fair hand respectfully to his lips.

"I did not tell you," continued the baronne, "of the manner in which I obtained the pass from the regent. I have been a sad dissembler, William, but it was for your sake; and when you think of poor Mirabel, and all her faults, do not forget that she strove to provide

for your happiness at the expense of her own."

"Believe me, that not one of the innumerable proofs of your generosity will ever be forgotten by me," answered William, earnestly ; "sincerely do I wish that it lay in my power to serve, or even to oblige you."

"I would give much," replied Mirabel, colouring deeply as she spoke, "to possess something that had once belonged to you,—the little chain you always wear"—

As the baronne spoke, she placed her hand gently on the chain ; but William's young horse, alarmed by the movement, swerved suddenly on one side ; the links, which had become entangled in the embroidery of her riding-dress, snapped asunder, and falling to the earth, were trampled beneath the animal's hoofs. William was not more distressed than Mirabel ; to both it appeared an omen, though of a different signification ; placing the remnant of the chain in his bosom, and springing to the earth, he endeavoured to collect the scattered links, but in vain.

“I am sorry,” he said, “that you should have asked me for the only thing in the world which it is not in my power to give you.”

Mirabel sighed deeply.

“Forgive me, William,” she said, “for having destroyed a gift evidently so dear to you. Alas! this warning was not needed to convince me that, had I the power, or even the inclination to break the bond of that union, such an act would only sever us more completely.”

William knew not how to answer her,—he looked at the broken chain, and then at the ring, and even while he remembered the conditions of the last gift, it appeared to accuse him, of having wronged Blanch by its acceptance.

Mirabel read his thoughts—she bade him farewell hastily—she waved her hand; and ere William could reply, she put her horse into a smart canter, and was soon out of sight.

Clifford followed her example, and on arriving at his hotel, dressed with more than usual care, showed himself in all the frequented quarters of Paris, and went to court in the evening. Here he once more encountered Stanley, who had

come to take leave of the royal family; and, Clifford regretting the misunderstanding that subsisted between them, offered him his hand, which Roland accepted—though not with the warmth of former days. As he did so, his quick eye recognised the stone which had so often sparkled on Mirabel's hand, and feigning to admire its brilliancy, Roland confirmed his belief that it bore the coat of the De Bernays. He made no remark, but left the palace at an early hour, to prepare for the morrow's departure.



CHAPTER IX.

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THE morning of the appointed day was like one destined for some great undertaking. There was war in the heavens between light and darkness, and the sun was struggling with a host of sable clouds that followed each other in rapid succession, but was unable to scatter them from his path. The wind joined to aid the adverse clouds upon their way, urging them continually forward, and driving them rapidly over the face of the sun, which consequently emitted brilliant but fitful rays. Cold and boisterous, and blowing directly from the north-east, the wind vented the remnant of its fury upon the earth, rocking the trees, whirling the dust in columns, and howling round the head of man in loud and angry menaces.

On such a morning, William Clifford took leave of his Parisian abode, having used every possible precaution in that quarter. He had dealt munificently with his landlord and the servants, whom he dismissed; and had sent all that he possessed secretly to the baronne's chateau, excepting a sum of money which he carried on his person. After giving out that he intended to go into the country for a few days previous to his departure for England, he thrust the papers relating to his uncle's estates into his bosom, and mounting his horse, proceeded in the direction of a house on the boulevards, where he was to assume his former disguise.

Possessing in an eminent degree that elevation of sentiment, and fearlessness of spirit, which only required the development of opportunity to assume the form of heroism, William experienced a proud satisfaction, as he considered the dangers of the enterprise in which he had now embarked; and even while his thoughts turned towards Blanch, he felt that such an

action as the one he had in view, would render him more worthy of her love.

His train of thought was interrupted by suddenly being accosted by a stranger, whose manner and address were those of a gentleman and a compatriot.

“If I am not mistaken,” he began, “I am speaking to Mr. Clifford, sometimes called the Baron de Brissac?”

“The same, sir,” replied William, checking his horse as he spoke; “if you have any business with me, may I request that you will be speedy in your communications, as I am on my way to an appointment.”

“You must pardon me then,” continued the stranger, “but my errand is an important one; and having been absent for some weeks from Paris, the necessary delay has been already prolonged. I am the bearer of a letter to you: and the charge that I received with it, determined me to present the paper in person.”

Clifford broke the seal, and read the few but emphatic words in which Blanch described her painful situation. He knew not what to do:

he could not return to the house and attempt to reply to Blanch, for had he had time to do so, he could offer no account of himself but the alarming truth. The stranger watched the passing struggle in silence, and then urged him to return for a few moments to his hotel, in order to write the answer. But William assured him that this was impossible, totally and entirely impossible.

“That is strange,” replied the bearer of the letter, “for the lady from whom it came, impressed me with the belief that it required an immediate and satisfactory reply.”

“I trust,” said Clifford, “that it may lay in my power to return you one in a few days.”

“A few days!” echoed the stranger, “I should be sorry to take upon myself the responsibility of such an answer; I must request, indeed I must request, sir, that you will oblige me by some message, however laconic, that at least *I* may not incur the suspicion of having failed in the trust confided in me.”

William reflected for a few moments, ignorant

of the stranger's connexion with Blanch, how could he reply through his means ?

“Tell her from whom the letter came,” he said at length, “these words :—‘ *Qui bien aime, tard oublie.*’”

The stranger smiled cynically, put spurs to his horse and was out of sight in a moment ; while Clifford, not daring to dwell on what had passed, dashed forward with the speed of lightning, assumed the disguise, and found the baronne waiting alone, at the appointed spot.

She wore a small silken mask, ostensibly to shield her from the piercing wind, but more probably to conceal the emotion, against which she struggled ; and yet she laid it aside immediately on arriving before the prison.

They rode forward side by side in silence ; Mirabel did not dare to raise her eyes upon that being whom she loved so fervently, lest the recollection of his danger should unfit her for the task she had undertaken ; and yet at every step they took, she felt painfully that the time was drawing to a close, when the possibility of seeing him again, of hearing his voice, or rejoic-

ing in his presence, would be at an end. What hope, what comfort was there for her, in prospect? the object of their enterprise was speedy and eternal separation, with a possibility of danger and death befalling one, to save whom she would have yielded her life without a murmur.

In any case she could not hope to see him again, while the thought of suspense, the prolonged suspense she was doomed to suffer, first during his escape from prison, and then after his arrival in England, made her heart sink within her. William attempted to speak, but when he did so she trembled from head to foot, and waved her hand as if entreating silence. They arrived, they sprang to the ground, and the baronne calling every energy into action, drew the mask from her face, and inquired for the commandant. As if to heighten their distress, the governor was engaged; but the principal officer entreated the Baronne de Bernay, to walk in the garden until the commandant was at liberty to wait upon her. Followed a step behind by Clifford, who was to personate her

steward, she paced up and down for some time without speaking. But the tenderness with which her heart was overflowing could not long be restrained.

“ William,” she said, raising her large full eye upon him, with an expression of the most devoted affection that ever filled the breast of woman, “ if my prayers can reach the mercy-seat, you will be preserved. Do quickly what must be done, lest you put my resolution to too strong a test. God bless you ! God protect you, *my* William !” Alas ! she knew he was not hers, and yet she loved to say so.

“ Tell me,” she cried, “ tell me, even if you know it to be false, that we shall meet again ; and when you are gone, when you are happy, oh ! let me live sometimes in your remembrance ; let my name sometimes be pronounced by the voice that I shall never hear again. Hark ! hark ! there are footsteps ; the governor is coming ! William ! speak to me, comfort me, strengthen me !” Once more she cast an appealing look upon him, a glance replete with

sorrow, fear, and tenderness, that harrowed William's soul.

He pressed her hand, he bade her farewell, he blessed her in a voice where firmness struggled with emotion, and thanked her for all she had encountered for his sake. Mirabel did not trust herself to reply; but at that moment, every sacrifice she had made was undervalued in her mind.

When the governor entered the garden, she approached him with a firmness for which William was not prepared. "I am come," she said, "to trespass for the last time on your goodness, as I return to Paris in a few days."

"Am I to understand, madam," inquired the governor, with somewhat, as she fancied, of a cynical tone, "that you wish to be admitted yourself this morning? for the orders lately have been doubly strict regarding visits."

"I know it well," she replied; "but I have many reasons for visiting my kinsman by proxy. As I before told you, we are not the best friends in the world; besides which, our negotiations relate to pecuniary matters, and I have



no head for business. I must therefore request you will repeat your kindness by admitting my steward this morning."

The governor shrugged his shoulders, and led the way; but not until Mirabel, in a tone of authority had desired William not to detain her long, and signified her intention of awaiting his return in the little chapel, as before. Thither she now proceeded, in a state of mind which it would be useless to attempt describing. She knelt upon the same spot; and although the fervency of her supplication enabled her in some measure to support the agony of suspense and terror, yet her prayers produced none of that calm and blessed repose which she had felt upon a former occasion. She rose at length, and listened until her sense of hearing became painfully acute, and her own convulsive breathing grew audible and distinct; she checked her breath, and then the beating of her heart forced itself upon her ear. She heard a sound! the door was pushed aside, and a figure appeared on the threshold; the resemblance was so close, that Mirabel fondly

hoped the scheme had been abandoned. The man advanced—he bent his knee to the high altar—and on leaving the chapel, he dipped his hand in the sacred water—and made the symbol of that faith which William Clifford did not profess. The baronne thanked the commandant for his courtesy, she mounted her horse, and, followed by her companion, left the precincts of the prison slowly. No sooner, however, had they entered the park, than she gave the rein to her horse, a movement that was imitated by Dumont.

They proceeded rapidly through an unfrequented part of the domain, and arrived at a small shed, where Mirabel knocked gently at the door. It was opened by Armand, her page, who led forth two stout horses, one of which was immediately mounted by a boy in the dress of a countryman.

The baronne whispered a few words in Armand's ear, and then turned to Dumont. "We must part here," she said; "for the fidelity of your guide I will answer with my life: he has my orders for your route; and

on the coast there lies a vessel, commanded by the boy's father, one of my own tenants. I have no further power, but my earnest wishes will attend you ; one word—when is the hour of escape ?”

“ Sunset,” replied Dumont.

Mirabel shuddered. She then offered her hand, which he received with grateful respect.

“ Could you,” he exclaimed, “taste the ecstasy of restoration to freedom, of breathing the pure air of heaven, or gazing without interruption on the face of nature, your noble heart would be repaid.”

Again she bade him prosper, while Armand mounted the horse from which Dumont had just alighted, and then galloping home by several by-paths, the baronne regained her chateau, before many of its inmates had suspected her absence.

Dumont watched her turn the corner of the road.

“ Gracious Heaven !” he exclaimed ; “ are not the degenerate sons of France shamed into heroism, by the example of such a woman ?”

CHAPTER X.

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SHALL we follow Mirabel through that dreadful day; shall we dwell upon the prolonged terror of every hour, or tell how she watched the sun's course in the heavens, and longed for, even while she dreaded, the hour of his setting? That moment came at last; dark clouds had for some time concealed his progress, and yet she remained with her straining eyes fixed upon the sky. The sun reappeared, like a globe of condensed fire, shorn of his rays, by the surrounding mist; and, as Mirabel gazed upon it, she fancied she could read William's destiny in the threatening and portentous aspect of the heavens. She had never been so sanguine as either Dumont or Clifford, nor did the knowledge of their plans inspire her with any feeling of security.

The scheme that had been agreed on for Clifford's escape, was as follows : William was to conceal himself behind the door in such a manner, that when the gaoler entered he might spring upon him, and, taking the necessary precautions to prevent the old man from crying out, bind him with a cord he had procured for that purpose. Clifford was then to possess himself of the keys, and the long loose dress which the gaoler wore, and, locking the door behind him, to descend the stairs, in the character of a porteclefs. So far the locality appeared to favour their views ; for Dumont had been confined in one part of the donjon which was then thinly tenanted, and those officers who were likely to detect the fraud were consequently engaged in another part of the building. The rest of the scheme had been devised by the baronne and her page, and the latter was by this time at his post in the wood, with two saddle-horses, pursuing the same plan as Dumont. With this difference, however, that Mirabel had intrusted William's guidance to her own foster-brother, and that she recommended a southern route, towards the

coast, as less likely to be tracked. To relieve her own anxiety, she had arranged to mount one of the turrets of her chateau, and fix her eyes upon a particular spot, where she could perceive the two horsemen pass, and Armand was to wave a white scarf, in order to distinguish them. But Mirabel looked in vain, she saw nothing, she heard nothing, but the gathering mist of evening and the whispers of terror. One hour of agony, of prolonged apprehension passed, after the time at which she might reasonably have expected them; it was almost dark, and yet her quick eye caught sight of a solitary horseman, who bore no scarf! A quarter of an hour elapsed, and she heard the clattering of a single horse's hoofs on the hard road. Mirabel flew to the private entrance, and Armand, pale and breathless, threw himself at her feet.

“All is lost!” he cried, “the gaoler was changed, the new one was young and powerful, they struggled, and he was overpowered; so much have I learned from one of the soldiers. By this time the regent knows all! Fly, madam,

fly; every blame must attach to you! There are horses in the stable, and Armand will follow you every where!”

“Fly, Armand?” said Mirabel, from what should I fly? what have I to fear now?”

“All, every thing!” cried the affectionate boy, “imprisonment, torture, death, dishonour!”

She shook her head—she smiled—Oh, God, that smile!

Armand kneeled before her, he seized the hem of her robe.

“Oh, fly, fly!” he said, “it will be too late soon; by all you love, by all you ever loved; for the sake of William, of Gaspard, save yourself by flight!”

“You talk idly, boy,” she replied, with a calmness of tone that was appalling, when compared with the wild wandering of her eye. “You bid me save my life for the sake of one who is dead, of one who soon may be so; would you advocate the cowardice which clings to mere existence, when every tie connecting it with happiness is snapped asunder?”

“But, oh!” continued the page, “remember every circumstance that will aggravate the re-

gent's fury; consider," he clasped his hands together, "consider that neither your rank, nor your sex, can exempt you from those laws which revenge may carry into effect—think on the possibility of torture."

There was again that fearful smile!

"It would not last, Armand," she replied; "the heart that is nearly broken with the pressure of misfortune, would yield to the first pressure of pain."

"Lady," cried the boy, distractedly, "we drank life from the same source, and when your noble brother and mine, left his house, he bade me watch over your safety, and never, never quit you; for his sake, for mine, remember what you will be subjected to—the insolent taunts of the Duke of Orleans, the aspersions he will cast upon your spotless reputation. Though death may have no terror, dishonour can have no charms."

"Armand," replied Mirabel, proudly, "my innocence is known to God, and to him I love the best on earth; what is the voice of the world to me?"

Armand rose in despair, wounded, perhaps,



that his sincere affection should have so little effect upon her mind—so slight a value in her esteem. Mirabel read his thoughts, and she gave him her hand.

“Do not believe me unmindful of you, Armand, unmindful of the only being in this breathing world that loves me. Yet listen to me, Armand; there may be a chance, a possibility of saving him, and there is no one to attempt it but myself. Say no more! I will remain.”

That same night, at a late hour, the Baronne de Bernay was placed alone in her coach, and conducted, with a strong escort of gendarmerie, to Paris. It was in vain that she requested the attendance of one of her women or even her page, the orders on that head were precise. She felt these things little, however. The blow which Mirabel had sustained in hearing of William's failure, had, for the moment, stunned all her mental faculties. Alone, in the dead of night, on her road, as she believed, to the regent, whom she might now consider as the bitterest of her enemies, she experienced

no sensations of terror or alarm. As the coach drove heavily along, the baronne strove to rouse herself from this species of stupor, and to meditate upon the course she should pursue, but in vain; every power seemed paralyzed by the shock she had lately received. The carriage, at length, stopped before the palace, and Mirabel inquired whither she was going, but the officer of the gendarmerie merely replied by a military salute. Yet the baronne read in his countenance a degree of pity that consoled her, and, while threading the innumerable corridors by his side, she again addressed him.

“You are conducting me to the regent?” she said.

He made no answer, but by a look of unequivocal compassion.

“For the sake of that mother whose affection or whose memory is dear to you,” she continued, “for the sake of her, who at one or other moment interested the tenderest feelings of your heart, do not refuse my prayer! I have exasperated the Duke of Orleans, you know him sufficiently to calculate my danger; acquaint his mother

of my arrival, let her be informed that I humbly solicit her presence.”

The officer placed his hand upon his heart, and his finger upon his lips, then knocked at a door which they now approached. It was opened by a page, who admitted the baronne and then instantly quitted the apartment. Mirabel looked up and found herself in a small writing-closet appropriated to the regent, who was now seated at the further end by a table, on which lay a confusion of scattered papers. The room was lighted by two large silver sconces immediately above the duke's head. He seemed busily employed, and did not lift his eyes until the page had withdrawn. When he did so, and perceived the prisoner standing alone in the centre of the apartment, every angry and evil passion appeared upon his countenance to enhance its native ugliness. He looked at her for some time, and she sustained his glance in silence.

“ Approach,” he at length exclaimed, “ Baronne de Bernay, and deny, if you can, the charges which are preferred against you; but before you do so, let me warn you to avoid that

course of falsehood and subterfuge in which you have lately dealt. On one day last week you procured from the regent a pass into the prison of Vincennes, under false pretences? I await your reply, madam."

"I did so," she answered.

The duke proceeded.

"On the next day you rode to the said prison, and there most treacherously introduced into the cell of a state prisoner, an Englishman, by name William Clifford, who passed on that occasion for your steward. Can you refute my assertions?"

"When I am able to do so with truth," replied the baronne, "I will presume to interrupt your highness, and not till then."

"Moreover, this morning you returned in company with the said Englishman to the dungeon, and there, in direct defiance of the established laws of your country, and the duty and allegiance you owe to the king your sovereign, you aided and abetted the escape of a state prisoner, thereby subjecting yourself and your accomplices to the extreme penalty of the

law." Once more the regent paused, but receiving no answer, continued as follows :

" Do not be so misled as to imagine that the law will be violated on your account. Neither your youth nor your beauty, madam, can have any weight in the public trial to which you must be brought. The only step I could take in your favour, was thus to see you myself, and listen to any defence you might think proper to make. It appears to me that you have none, and although your demeanour towards myself has ever been cold, haughty and disrespectful, yet I am weak enough to regret the sacrifice of one who has forfeited every claim to my mercy and consideration."

As the Duke of Orleans paused to take breath, he felt a strange mixture of opposing sensations with regard to Mirabel. On her first entrance the desire of intimidating, of humbling her lofty spirit, had been paramount to every other ; but when he saw her with the traces of sorrow and suffering, on her once beaming countenance ; when he found those lips from which the jest and the repartee once flowed so gaily, closed in the silence of despair ; when he believed,

that fear had triumphed over pride, then the natural kindness which was too often obscured by baser feelings, for a short time became apparent. He rose and advanced towards her. "Mirabel," he said, "there are conditions on which you may secure your safety. Denounce William Clifford as one who abused your confidence, and possessed himself of the pass, under pretence of negotiating your kinsman's affairs! Do this, and inform me of the place where the late prisoner lies concealed, and you are safe. Here are writing materials, and I will witness the deposition myself. Thus you will not only be rescued from all danger, but spared the terror and disgrace of a public trial."

He took her hand with more gentleness than was usual to him, and attempted to lead her towards the writing-table.

Mirabel however disengaged her hand, and replied: "I am indeed grateful for your highness's merciful intentions, but if the conditions you name be the only chance of escape, they will avail but little. The scheme for entering the prison was planned and executed by myself, while William Clifford acted on that occasion

according to my injunctions; and as to betraying him, for whom I have already risked so much, your highness knows me better than to entertain so mean an opinion of my fidelity." She spoke calmly, but sadly, and measured her words, lest they should injure William's cause. The baronne's answer once more roused the duke's anger, even though he admired the resolution she displayed.

"By Heavens!" he cried, "you trifle with me and with yourself. Madam, do you seriously refuse the only possibility of escape?"

"I must do so," she said, "I have no choice."

The regent gazed at her for a moment in silent astonishment, and then exclaimed, "Tell me, and beware of prevarication or falsehood, what strange interest have you suddenly taken in the fate of this prisoner? a man of whose existence I believed you ignorant."

"By replying to that question, monseigneur," answered the baronne, "I might implicate myself and others."

"By the blessed martyrs!" exclaimed Philip, as he again rose from his chair, "this is not to

be borne ! Are you aware, madam, that there are means which never fail—ay !” he added, “to wring confession from the proudest lips, and to clothe it in tones of deep-felt anguish ?”

“Such means would fail with me,” replied Mirabel, losing the depressed tone in which she had hitherto spoken, and answering him boldly, “for I would rather follow the example of the Athenian woman, and tear out my tongue by the roots, than suffer it to betray or compromise a friend !”

Every word, every moment, added some new feelings to the many that already struggled in the Duke’s bosom : there was love, if it deserved the name, anger, indignation, jealousy ; but now the suspicion, which he had long harboured, was nearly confirmed, and, in order to discover all, he made a great effort to suppress his feelings.

“Misguided girl !” he continued ; “do not thus rashly reject every possibility of salvation until it be too late. Your obstinacy, believe me, will only hasten the fate of that friend in whom you profess so mysterious an interest. Confess all to me : it is your duty—your interest



to do so: tell me what hidden motives, what secret reasons, urged you to so rash a step. Since we have been acquainted, I have ever heard you profess a hatred, nay, a contempt, for political cabals."

"Most true," she replied; "and may the God of justice be my witness! that no motives of a political nature induced me to further the prisoner's escape; neither was his deliverance in any way connected with political considerations."

"Could this be proved," rejoined the Duke of Orleans, craftily, "it might be of service, not only to you, but to all who are implicated in the transaction. Yet how can I—how can any one, believe this to be a fact? You tell me that William Clifford, who now lies at Vincennes under sentence of death, was but an instrument in your hands. Had the case been reversed, I could have believed the possibility of that unfortunate young man's sacrificing himself for some high-flown notion of friendship, after what has lately reached my ears respecting his intimacy with the prisoner at Bordeaux."

Mirabel's natural acuteness was deadened by grief and anxiety, her penetration numbed, and she fell but too easily into the regent's snare.

"I never said that William Clifford was an instrument in my hands," she replied, "I merely affirmed that the plan was concerted by me, and that all blame should consequently be transferred to me alone. Your royal highness is right; William Clifford, during his residence at Bordeaux, contracted a zealous friendship with this man whom they call Dumont, entirely divested of all political considerations, the bare mention of which was prohibited in their intercourse. Clifford applied to me to procure permission for him to visit the prisoner; and instead of laying the case before your highness, I judged it safe to procure a pass for my kinsman. It can easily be conceived how the wretched appearance and melancholy state of the captive worked upon the generosity of his friend, whose rash attempt has failed. But allow me once more to repeat, that I must be considered as the culprit—I, who first laid the plan—I, who imposed upon

your highness's generosity—I, who conducted him to Vincennes as my steward; who aided and abetted the escape of one, and would have done so for the other."

"Your explanation, madam," rejoined the duke, with a sneer, "is the most inexplicable part of the affair; for you now tell me, that the interest in the prisoner's fate is all on the young Englishman's side; and yet you boast that the execution of the plan was your own. Am I to attribute this glorious conspiracy to the gratitude you owe the royal family of France, or to the ridiculous and disgraceful farce you have been so long and so vainly playing with this young foreigner?"

"Farce!" echoed Mirabel, as she clasped her hands together.

"Farce, madam!" repeated Philip, at length giving way to all the violence of his passions; "Tell me! If you have any hopes of mercy for yourself or him, answer me truly, before I abandon you both to a fearful and ignominious death—do you love this Englishman?"

As he spoke, he grasped Mirabel's hand rudely; and, with a countenance on which the

struggles of rage and jealousy were but too plainly depicted, he looked on her as if he would have torn out her heart to see what was written thereon. But it was not necessary; this direct appeal overcame every scruple of pride or caution. Suddenly her animation returned; her eye recovered its light, and for a moment a smile beamed on her countenance.

“ Love him !” she exclaimed; “ ay ! as I love justice, and hope for mercy ! Love him ! with all the passion, devotion, and fidelity of which the human heart is capable !”

The regent heard her; and as she uttered this unfortunate and incautious speech, he dashed her hand from him. “ May his death,” he cried, “ be rendered doubly bitter by that very love, may he now, and for ever—”

“ Be blest !” exclaimed Mirabel, interrupting him eagerly, and lifting her eyes to heaven.

“ He dies, minion !” continued the infuriated Prince; “ before to-morrow’s sun has set; and the very words you have spoken shall cause the rack to give him a foretaste of death.”

“ Oh, no ! no ! no !” cried the wretched Mirabel, casting herself at the regent’s feet;

“ You will save him ! You must, you will save him ! ”

She hid her face between her hands, while the duke looked down upon her agony with bitter exultation.

“ Save him ! ” he said, “ yes ! to be daily insulted by his presence ! to see him in the possession of her for whose love I myself have so long and so vainly sued ? No, madam ! the time is now come when your conduct demands some return. Your trial shall be deferred, and your heart set at rest, in the first instance, about your favoured lover. We will travel together to Vincennes ; it is a road that you have passed before in the company of a younger and a handsomer gallant than myself. We will see the prisoner ourselves ; we will learn if his discretion can withstand the torture ; we will question him as to the route of his friend and your’s ; we will discover if his fanatical Calvinism will require a Hugonot priest to attend his latest moments ; we will bid him take leave of the world, and of ourselves. Oh ! trust me, it will afford no slight amusement. We shall have

tears, and vows, and tokens; we shall have goodly talk of constancy and resolution, of courage and example."

"Would you drive me to madness?" cried Mirabel, starting to her feet; "Would you make me believe that some fiend has borrowed the likeness of a man, to heighten the misery of such an hour as this? My only prayer is for death, and that all the horrors with which you have menaced William Clifford may fall on me—on me, who merit them doubly, as a servant of the crown, and as a native of France. Let him be pardoned, banished for ever, if you will, and let me abide the fate which my own conduct has entailed."

"Your subtlety can no longer impose on me," rejoined the duke; "you have reckoned too highly on your boasted wit, madam. It cannot disentangle you from such schemes as these. But I see through your plans. You think to procure the freedom of your lover; and, after a useless display of courage, to obtain your own pardon by some preconcerted *coup de théâtre*, while Philip of Orleans is to

become your laughing-stock, when, with your wonderful talent for evasion, you stand on the shores of England, by the side of your triumphant lover. But it shall not be so," he added, with a sneering smile : " you must still live at court, my fair Mirabel, that I may at last taste the sweets of revenge, and day by day revel in every tear and sigh you lavish on his tomb."

" As you hope for justice ! as you hope for mercy !" she cried, " grant me William's pardon !" and let the bitter stroke of the law fall on her who is guilty."

" Content yourself, Mirabel," replied the Duke, in the same tone of contemptuous triumph, " this wonderful display of heroism has lasted long enough. You love this Englishman, but the light of the sun must be dearer to you than that of his eyes. He shall die ; but my hand would rather sign its own death-warrant, than consign so lovely a victim to the executioner. Be therefore grateful that I do not take you at your word, or understand in their literal sense these sublime professions of resolution."

“This is surely not a moment,” replied the baronne earnestly, “to affect courage if I did not feel it. It is misery that makes me fearless, for I have ever held bodily anguish as light when compared to the sufferings of the mind. You speak of torture; what are broken limbs to a lacerated heart?—you speak of death, the pang of which lasts so short a time and is followed by rest, Oh God!” she added, raising her eyes, “call not my hope presumptuous, which looks for that mercy with Thee, which is denied me by my fellow sinners.” Once more she paused, and then added, “Hear me! and esteem my words as those of one already condemned, who dares not lie upon the threshold of eternity! Do as you say, condemn William Clifford to death, and, in violation of the laws you profess to uphold, attempt to shield the real criminal. I will enter the tribunal of justice, I will be my own accuser, and summon the governor and gaoler of Vincennes with my own servants to corroborate my confession, and there, in the face of the nation, I will demand the doom which your cruelty, not your mercy, denies.”



“Not so, Mirabel,” exclaimed the regent, “I will watch over that precious life, and preserve in spite of yourself, but not to bless a rival.”

A sudden thought, a sudden ray of hope, flashed on her mind. There seemed still one chance of saving him she loved, and, though the burning hues of shame forced themselves into her cheeks, forehead, and bosom, she spoke in a low but distinct voice.

“William Clifford is betrothed, he does not return my love, and when I ask his life, it is that he may be restored to her who has received his plighted vows.”

The regent heard, and giving way to the first and more ignoble feelings of his heart, he suffered a laugh of brutal exultation to burst from his lips. “Is it so !” he exclaimed, “and has the proud heart of Mirabel de Bernay learned at length, by sad and humbling experience, what others feel?—and have those smiles of which she was so chary, been wasted upon one who does not feel their worth? Oh ! what a tale for the myriad with whose feelings she has sported !—Do you not fear, sweet one, to trust a

secret so important to my keeping? Do you not dread the voice of the multitude that will whisper as you pass, behold the hapless and rejected damsel who sued in vain for William Clifford's love?"

"Philip of Orleans," cried the baronne, raising her head proudly, while her form and face breathed indignation from every line, "You have this night proved yourself unworthy the name of a prince, a man, and a Christian; you have broken your plighted word to protect and assist me; you have taken advantage of my wretchedness to entangle and perplex me; you have abused your power to oppress me, and now you have added insult to injury, and laden me with taunts which, were I a man, I would hurl back in defiance at your head. But you are aware of my inability to revenge myself: I am a woman, an orphan, unprotected, friendless, miserable. You have exercised a cold-blooded and cowardly tyranny upon me; you have dared to offend my ears by the open declaration of a guilty passion, and have basely owned it led you to revenge! Where are your

titles of ‘Just but merciful,’ when such detested motives regulate your conduct? Where your boasted generosity, when you glory in the wretchedness of one who has never harmed you? Will not my death, or eternal separation from him I love, satisfy the craving of your vengeance? Can the disinterestedness of my motives awake no answering emotion in your mind? All I ask, all I require at your hands, is to restore William Clifford to my rival.”

“Such devotion,” said the regent, in a subdued and altered tone, “will melt his heart. Who could venture to compare any other woman upon earth with you, Mirabel?”

“Do not fear it,” she continued; “the affections of William Clifford are too deep, too pure, to be so evanescent! Nor would Mirabel de Bernay ever stoop so low as to accept an impulse of momentary gratitude, in return for her love.” She watched the regent’s countenance while she spoke. “You are wavering between mercy and vengeance,” she cried, “oh! let the blessed spirit of charity rise triumphant in your mind!”

Again she knelt before him, exclaiming.

“ Philip, Duke of Orleans, grant me Clifford’s pardon, and all the love that honour can command is yours for ever ! Deal with me then as you will ; the rack shall extort nothing but blessings on your head, and my latest prayer shall rise from the scaffold in your behalf !”

The Duke of Orleans passed his hand before his eyes, as feelings, which were foreign and unfamiliar, poured upon a heart not obdurate by nature, inclining it to clemency ; while Mirabel remained kneeling at his feet, with her head bowed over her hands, her eyes closed, and her whole frame visibly agitated, as she felt that the last appeal had been made. Oh ! dead to every feeling of generosity and honour must that man be, who could look unmoved on anguish such as hers, or steel his heart against the eloquence of grief so profound ! Fallen, indeed, from that superiority, which invests him with the proud privilege of supporting, defending, and protecting woman, is he who can fail her in the hour of need, when, casting aside the vain disguise, in which she strives to veil her weak-

ness, she throws herself upon the protection of the nobler sex, designed by infallible wisdom as her defence and stay.

Corrupted as the regent's heart had become, cruelty had never been an inmate there; and even in his public functions, the dictates of mercy were never slighted, when compatible with justice. He now looked upon the beautiful girl before him, whose virtue, notwithstanding her caprices, had inspired a sensation of reverence, that in some degree chastened his feelings towards her; and his determination was fixed. He moved quietly towards the table, and traced some hasty lines, to which he affixed his sign and seal. Scarcely had he done so, when the door opened, and his mother entered the room. The noise of her footstep attracted the baronne's attention; she raised her eyes, — she beheld the regent standing beside her, with a paper in his extended hand — she started up — she seized it — she pressed it to her lips — then turning to the duchess, she uttered a cry of joy, and fell senseless in her arms.

CHAPTER XI.

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DURING the time occupied by these occurrences, events were proceeding at Hampton Court in their natural course. The accounts which Sir Philip gained of William Clifford were more favourable to his views than he had dared hope. Tracing his unconscious enemy from Bordeaux to Paris, he heard of him there as the companion of the regent, the darling of the fair Parisians, and lastly, as the declared lover of the most beautiful maid of honour in the household of the Duchess of Orleans. True or false the news was invaluable, and Sir Philip was determined to husband it to the best advantage. Feeling sure that he would not be supposed to speak impartially, he thought it best to observe a profound silence himself, while Lady Courtenay was directed to excite her daughter's curiosity, and urge her to

inquiry, by alluding to the reports in a vague manner. In this, however, Blanch disappointed their scheme, for if her mother's insinuations made any impression upon her, she took care to conceal it most effectually.

In the meanwhile Miss Bellenden had received no answer from Paris, and Blanch had never referred to the circumstance of the letter since the first day, so that the subject most frequently in the thoughts of both, was entirely banished from their conversation. Mary Bellenden, a lively warm-hearted girl, was only withheld by scruples of delicacy, from soliciting her friend's confidence : and, partly guessing the truth, she was puzzled to account for a reserve which formed no part of her own character. From a casual correspondent at Paris, she learned that her cousin, to whom the note for Clifford had been intrusted, was absent from the metropolis, but was shortly expected to return.

This piece of intelligence she communicated to Blanch forthwith as a sufficient reason for the delay ; but there was another part of the letter which caused Miss Bellenden much uneasiness, and many doubts as to what course she should

pursue. Her correspondent entered into the details of Parisian society, the gossip and scandal of the court, and amongst other things mentioned the engagement said to subsist between the beautiful and hitherto the insensible Baronne de Bernay, and a handsome young Englishman, by name William Clifford. The writer, seemed confident of the truth of this report, although Mirabel de Bernay, she said, still endeavoured to keep up the appearance of that cold indifference in which she had so long gloried. Mary Bellenden was puzzled how to act: from many circumstances that had passed, she could no longer doubt her friend's attachment to Clifford, and her spirit rose within her, as the possibility of Blanch's being forgotten and neglected, suggested itself to her mind. Yet the tale might not be true, and even if it were true, what plea could she find for disclosing the secret to Blanch, except by mentioning the report in casual conversation, a plan against which her heart revolted. For young and happy as she appeared, Mary Bellenden had felt what true affection is, and she shrank from the idea of inflicting a wound on the



sensibility of another. Could Sir Philip have fathomed her thoughts, what a powerful instrument she would have been in his hands, to what useful purposes might he have shaped and modelled her feelings on the subject!

In the mean time, Lord Dalmaine, who had been absent on duty for some little time, returned with his royal master and the rest of the court, from London. The few intervals of leisure which he enjoyed (when an increase of duty occupied the greater part of the day, and the whole of the evening), were dedicated to Blanch. This did not surprise her, after what had passed, as she firmly believed that Dalmaine's pride shrank from the disclosure that his suit had been in vain, which an abrupt secession from the society of the Courtenays might appear to imply.

About this time, Roland Stanley made his appearance at Hampton Court, bringing with him a letter of recommendation from Madame D'Aubry to her brother. At another moment, Sir Philip would most probably have treated his sister's protégé with neglect; but his

arrival seemed now most apt, and might be most advantageous. Keeping the whole thing a profound secret from Blanch, Sir Philip obtained an invitation for the new comer to the royal table, and sat next to him, loading him with civilities. He soon divined a part, at least, of Stanley's character. He talked with interest of his dear sister, and assured Mr. Stanley, without remorse, that Blanch had often spoken of him as an old and valued friend. He then proceeded to mention William Clifford, with an expression of countenance, and a gesture, that implied, "We understand each other on that subject, at least." Then changing his tone, he hinted at the admiration which one of his own friends evinced for his beloved daughter, who, he feared, had entangled herself in an ill-advised engagement, which her ideas of rectitude compelled her to keep.

He, himself, could know little of the truth, he said, but from various reports that had reached him, he had every reason to believe that, at least on one side, the vows had already been cancelled. Mr. Stanley would forgive the anxiety of a

parent, and the liberty he took in opening their acquaintance by so confidential a conversation, but Madame D'Aubry had mentioned him in terms of the highest respect, as a man of probity and feeling.

Stanley, on his part, confirmed in some degree, the reports relating to William Clifford, but he spoke only of appearances; for he was a cautious man, and there was something about Sir Philip's manner, that led him to distrust the intrinsic value of the confidence he expressed.

Stanley, therefore, kept back all he thought on the subject, and the greater part of what he himself had witnessed. Still, it was no difficult task to persuade him that it would be a charity to undeceive Blanch, as her own father had not scrupled to hint that she now bitterly regretted the circumstance that deterred her from accepting Lord Dalmaine's proposal.

They parted mutually pleased; Sir Philip at possessing so powerful an ally, and Stanley at having so soon gained a footing at court, and so easily discovered the means of obliging one

who might in the end prove most useful to him.

They were to meet at the reception that evening; and Sir Philip returned to his own apartments to escort his wife and daughter, anxiously looking forward to Blanch's meeting with Stanley.

Her eye was caught by his appearance the moment she entered the room, though he stood at some distance, in a little knot of courtiers, to whom his new friend had presented him. Unprepared to meet him, Blanch, for the first few seconds could not recollect who it was, and the pleasure she derived from seeing him was at first vague and confused.

It was the memory of the eye alone; though the associations that were stirred up by his presence, made her heart beat quick. She did, indeed, not know how he was connected with William Clifford, or why the little chapel of St. Estelle rose before her, as if in the glass of some fabled magician; but it was only for an instant that she remained thus bewildered, and then she recognised the friend of Ma-

dame D'Aubry, the associate, at least, of her betrothed husband. Quitting her mother's side, she traversed the apartment alone, and had greeted him warmly, before she perceived that a proceeding so unusual had attracted universal attention.

The sudden appearance of one who, though destitute of any other recommendation, has been our companion in the sweet summer-tide of our brightest days, who has trodden the ground that is dear to us, and looked upon the countenance of those we love, can no longer be an object of indifference, when the blessed reality has passed away, and cold and receding recollection becomes its scanty substitute. Together we can refresh the fading colours of the past, and by reviving the outline, recal in some measure to our minds, the original beauty of the picture, even though its primitive grace and brilliancy be lost for ever. Even the sound of the voice under such circumstances often becomes interesting from the associations connected with it, from the recollection of some other, some well-loved voice, which we have

heard mingling its tones with the one that now sounds in our ear. Blanch had, in fact, experienced a pleasure she little anticipated, in meeting with Stanley, and he was sincerely gratified by her warm reception ; though, as he looked on the once joyous face, he began to doubt some part of Sir Philip's information. In the course of conversation, he observed how fondly she hovered round the mention of those scenes in which Clifford had taken a prominent part, and when he himself first pronounced her lover's name, he watched with regret the high excitement that her countenance displayed. It required no further explanation to enlighten Stanley in regard to the real state of the case, and prove to him that the father had advocated his own cause rather than that of his daughter. Yet Roland was not unwilling to forward the views of Sir Philip on higher principles than those which generally actuated him. He firmly believed in the infidelity of William, and although the animosity which the conduct of the latter had excited, might perhaps diminish his reluctance to make it known to Blanch, yet Stanley with

all his errors, was not one to sacrifice the happiness of two hearts for any pitiful feeling of revenge. He judged it right, indeed, and honourable, an act of friendship to the lovely girl who had so kindly welcomed him, to bid her tear from her heart an image that was unworthy of so pure a shrine. Yet, with all his tact, Stanley was at a loss how to commence on so delicate and painful a subject. He knew how to deal with men of the world, how to cope with their subtlety or withstand their opposition, but the task he had now imposed upon himself was entirely different from any he had hitherto undertaken. He resolved to go on, however; and, to his honour be it spoken, that the caution which characterized him was now exerted for the best of purposes, while commiseration for Blanch dictated every word he uttered. He talked much of the changeableness of the world, a theme which he introduced by an expression of gratitude for her kindness.

“Consistency of disposition, my dear Miss Courtenay,” he said, “is, believe me, the rarest of all qualities: one which it is all but impossible

to find. Sentiments, however deeply rooted they may appear at the time, almost invariably give way beneath the changes of circumstance and those whom we have known and liked at one time, and in one place, are but too soon and too easily supplanted in another, where new interests spring up daily before us, shutting out those which formerly adorned our path."

Blanch fancied that the speaker was alluding to some report of her marriage with Dalmaine, and she hastened to remove the impression from his mind.

"Oh, no!" she said, looking up ingenuously as she spoke, "do not say that, Mr. Stanley; or at least exclude both yourself and me from such an imputation. Those whom I have once loved become doubly dear in absence; those who are not present appear always to have a prior claim to my thoughts, and in the mood which approaches the nearest to pleasure of any kind they are remembered more than ever. I judge from my own feelings, not possessing that power of diving into the thoughts of others, for which my dear aunt used to give you credit. But the mention of her name alone would



supply me with innumerable proofs of my argument; you know how kind she was to me, and I believe you know that I was not unmindful of that kindness, and yet how often now I think with regret of many little instances in which I might have sacrificed my will to hers, and I feel at this moment, that I would comply with any request she chose to make. So attached am I to the memory of the past, Mr. Stanley," she added, smiling, though her countenance was expressive of deep feeling, "that I verily believe Madame de Beaulieu's conversation would appear rather edifying than otherwise could she start up before us at this moment. I have always thought, I have always found it true, that a crowded room is the place from whence our thoughts and wishes fly the fastest towards the few that we love." She paused, and felt almost ashamed at having been betrayed into so long an oration. They were standing together in the recess of a large window that looked out upon the private garden which was brilliantly illuminated, and Blanch turned that way as if to admire the

scene. Stanley sighed, from a feeling of sincere grief, and, after a few moments' silence, replied :

“Such feelings as those you describe do honour indeed to the possessor, but forgive me my dear Miss Courtenay, if I express my belief that they are a fatal gift, entailing certain and lasting pangs. I do not mean to address you in the language of specious philosophy, when I affirm, that to enjoy a proportionate share of happiness in this world, our mental organization should more or less resemble that of the mass of human beings with whom we have to deal. Do not misunderstand me, or suppose that I would uphold that weakness which leads us into folly and error among the foolish and the vicious. Far is it from intention to broach such an opinion in your hearing ; but I speak from sad experience, when I ask why should we still entertain and cherish a regard for one, whose own evanescent feelings have long since been transferred to another object ? Is not that devotion useless and unprofitable which still trims and feeds the lamp, although the shrine has long been removed or demolished ?”

Blanch smiled, "I would choose a shrine," she said, "that was too firmly established for any casual accident to overturn it."

"You believe so," replied Stanley, "and you believe also, that it would be in your power to ascertain its stability. Or to speak plainly, you fancy it possible to collect from a knowledge of his other qualities, whether constancy forms part of a person's character; but I will show you how you may be mistaken; you discover that a fund of sympathy exists between you, you fathom its depths and find similarity of taste, opinion, and feeling, and strong in the knowledge of your own constancy, you fondly believe that in this particular also, the resemblance is complete. Alas! the moment of conviction is most bitter, bitter to those whom it most nearly concerns, and bitter let me also add, to those who from conscientious motives venture to display the painful truth."

"Blanch looked up with an alarmed air, "Mr. Stanley," she said, "your words imply something more than I at first believed: deal openly with me, I beseech you; your language, nay, your very looks convince me that some

distressing communication is weighing on your mind. You have known me before; in happier times, you were always welcome at that house which was more a home to me than any other. Treat me as a friend, there is no one near to listen to our conversation; the band sounds too loudly for any one but myself to hear you; what is there hanging over me?—what is it that makes you bend a look so full of compassion upon me?”

Stanley was moved. “You have divined the truth,” he replied, “and believe me, my dear Miss Courtenay, that I am induced to break the truth to you myself, lest you should hear it in a ruder manner and from less friendly lips. I have lived little among women—amongst the young and gentle such as you are—but do me the justice to think that my intention is kind, though my communication may appear abrupt and ill-worded. I offer you the advice that a parent, a brother, or a friend, might offer you in all sincerity, in all interest for your happiness, when I bid you to forget him whose inconstant heart has already thrown down your image to place a less worthy

worthy idol on its alter ; waste not the precious gift of your affections on one whose corrupted tastes and perverted morals render him totally undeserving, totally incapable of appreciating the singleness and purity of such a heart as yours. I pain you, but the truth must be told, and William Clifford like many a self-righteous character, has fallen a prey to the dissipation of Paris and the snares of a beautiful but designing woman.”

Blanch heard him in silence, she looked around the room to remind herself of the spot in which she stood, she turned towards the window and beheld the calm and peaceful landscape without, and still the fatal words rang in her ears, and deprived her of almost every other idea. Suddenly a thought struck her, and though her bosom heaved so as to render her breath short, and her voice almost indistinct, she exclaimed,

“ Beware, Mr. Stanley, how you lend yourself to the designs of others, or allow any one to persuade you to inflict so deep and cruel a wound as this !”

“You wrong me, Miss Courtenay,” replied Stanley, as he gazed on her with sincere compassion, alarmed at the effect which his words had produced; “I will attest the truth of what I have said by any sacred oath that you may name. Could you believe me so base—so cowardly? Oh, no! I forgive but too easily the first burst of surprise and sorrow. I would not have chosen this scene, or this moment, for such a conversation, had I not feared another opportunity might never present itself.”

To convince her, though it cost him an effort, he gave the account of William’s first meeting with Mirabel at Versailles; their interview at the cross; the scene in the garden on the night of the masquerade; and above all he dwelt upon the ring which he had seen on Clifford’s finger. He assured Blanch that her lover no longer wore the golden chain that on his first arrival at Paris appeared his dearest possession; that he had positively intimated his determination not to leave Paris for England; and that he had known of Stanley’s destination without one word of greeting to Blanch Courtenay.

How the poor girl heard him through with sufficient composure not to attract the attention of the whole room, was almost miraculous : but Sir Philip, who had watched from afar the progress of Stanley's discourse, now stepped forward, exactly at the proper moment, and laughingly insisted on disturbing their tête-à-tête, as both Lady Courtenay and himself wished to retire.

Blanch extended her hand to Stanley, lest he should suppose she still suspected his motives ; while he, feeling conscious that he had acted rightly, nevertheless participated sincerely in the grief that his narrative had caused. They did not meet again, for a few days afterwards he was summoned hastily and unexpectedly to Scotland.

The morning after the explanation with Stanley, Mary Bellenden, who was ignorant of all that had passed, brought a letter from her cousin in Paris, for Blanch's perusal. It related his hurried interview with Clifford ; the difficulty with which he extorted the laconic answer ; and the excuse made by William, that he was on his way to an appointment. The writer then pro-

ceeded to rally his fair cousin on the interest which she displayed in a man whose heart was intralled, and who, according to many people's belief, intended some day to invest himself with a legal right to the fortune, as well as the affections, of the *Baronne de Bernay*.

Blanch read the letter with all the firmness she could command ; for alas ! what was it but a confirmation of Stanley's sad tale !

Mary Bellenden watched her with interest : "Forgive me," she said, "if I have erred in giving you this letter ; but my cousin's word is to be depended upon, and now that he has repeated reports which I have before heard, I considered it incumbent on me to make you acquainted with the whole affair."

"You have done right and kindly," replied Blanch ; "and I thank you from my heart ; but you will excuse my saying any more on a subject that is most painful to me."

"As you please, dear Blanch," added Mary Bellenden ; "but as it is to be a forbidden topic for the future, allow me merely to suggest that I trust you will have sufficient pride to take the earliest opportunity of proving that



your happiness may be secured in another quarter."

It was well-meant, but was certainly an injudicious and not over-refined speech; and it wounded Blanch deeply; but she made no answer, except by thanking Mary Bellenden for her kindness.

Some time after, Blanch had a second interview with her father, in which his manner evinced more sorrow than anger: he remonstrated gently with his daughter, but at the same time wounded her pride in the most sensitive part, while he appeared anxious not to do so. Intentionally and carefully avoiding all mention of Lord Dalmaine, he inferred how painful it was to him to hear the reports that were studiously circulated, that his daughter was pining for a man who had long ago forgotten her. He confessed it was galling to hear the whispers, to observe the sneers, which he had not the power to quell; but added that he supposed some enemy had taken delight in spreading intelligence which ought carefully to be concealed; he even went so far as to hint that the king himself occasionally rallied him on the subject.

Stung to the quick by the insinuations of her father, bowed by disappointment and sorrow, Blanch left his presence, torn by conflicting feelings that would have excited the compassion of any less obdurate heart. At one moment, she felt convinced of the sad truth, that she was destined to experience the same humiliating fate as many others, too common an occurrence in the world, to excite much surprise or sympathy when known. At the next moment she scorned the thought of William's inconstancy, and recalling his words—"Think of me as you do now till you know me dead, or see me changed," she condemned herself for having listened to the report against him for one moment. Still Roland Stanley's evidence seemed conclusive, and above all, the circumstance of the ring was one she could in no way account for.

However, she shut up her sorrow in the recesses of her heart, relying solely upon the hopes and consolations springing from that source, the balm-bestowing waters of which, are never denied to those who seek them in sincerity; and, strengthening herself with prayer, she determined to await, in silence,

the issue of events over which she had no control. Yet every day weakened her hope, her faith in William's constancy; she knew that he had received her letter, and again and again she asked herself, what could prevent him from answering such an appeal? Even supposing him to be ill, a friend or servant might in a case of such extremity, be deputed to inform her of the reason. Another letter from Miss Bellenden's cousin announced that he had again proceeded to William's hotel to receive some more satisfactory answer, but he was gone, having paid his landlord and dismissed his servants. Mirabel too was absent; and the writer, still believing that the interest was on the side of Miss Bellenden, once more urged his fair relative to waste no more thought upon one whose affections were transferred to a woman that in no way resembled her. A lingering hope that William might be on his way to England supported Blanch for a short time longer, and then she fell into a gloomy, silent despair that quenched the light of her eye, and withered the bloom on her young cheek.

Lord Dalmaine watched with anxiety and

surprise the melancholy appearance of her he loved sincerely, and every day strengthened him in the conviction that some mystery hung over her. The possibility of a previous attachment, had frequently occurred to him, but Sir Philip had denied it positively, and he also was himself inclined to argue that such could not be the case. The natural effect of time would be to diminish the melancholy of disappointed affection, whereas, her gloom seemed to augment every day. He longed to come to an open understanding with Blanch herself, but was bound by his promise to Sir Philip.

Lady Courtenay in the mean while, was not an unconcerned spectator; the sight of her daughter awakened a sensation of remorse, which required all her husband's influence to pacify. He urged her to be passive for the present, to leave every thing as it was. "This is the moment," he said, "of struggle; when Blanch is convinced; when it is over, and her eyes are opened, she will then perceive the real path to happiness."

Blanch followed her parents mechanically in public, but the knowledge that the abstrac-

tion of her manner, and the change of her appearance, were universally remarked, added bitterness to her cup. She was too miserable for confidence, and even while she regarded Miss Bellenden with friendship and gratitude, she felt no inclination to reveal the secret that weighed upon her heart. Solitude was her only ambition; to be alone, she rose early and retired late. Sleep no longer lavished its blessings on her head, and yet the hour of night was the one to which she looked, when another day was passed, and she might retreat from the society that was now insufferable to her.

It is night that belongs to the mourner;—night, whose silent attributes bear the stamp, at least, of calm; and whose darkness assimilates with the complexion of the mind's atmosphere. The strings of the heart, which during the long and weary day, have been subject to the tension of the world's custom, and taught to echo faintly the sounds of gaiety, in that hour are once more slackened, and hang in listless relaxation under the influence of sorrow.

Poor Blanch would sit gazing upon the

portrait of his mother, upon the drawings, upon the books, upon the ring which he had given her. They were the same, no difference could be traced in these inanimate pledges, but he who had given them, alas! what had he become? When time, change, or absence has raised its barrier between us and our heart's best treasure, there is something peculiarly melancholy in the gift that was bestowed, when we were together in every acceptation of the word. Like the wreath of evergreens with which the mourner decks some hallowed grave, its unaltered aspect is the very circumstance that reminds us most forcibly of the bitter change, which has occurred in our own fate.

At intervals, Blanch's spirit would rise within her, and clasping her hands together, she would call on William to answer for the grief that he had caused her, while the possibility of the ridicule which her rival might cast upon the fruitless constancy which her father assured her had become a common topic of discourse, was insupportable to her crushed and wounded heart.

## CHAPTER XII.

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THERE is a pitch of mental absorption to which we may arrive under the arbitrary dominion of joy or sorrow that renders us, for the time, independent of all external influence which is unconnected with the one subject of our reflections. Engrossed with the melancholy struggle of her own heart, it mattered little to Blanch what aspect the society by which she was surrounded bore. Had she been blessed with a home where her sorrows were only known to be shared, her doubts only divined to be soothed and pacified, then might she have found consolation in domestic quiet; but Blanch had always a part to play, and she, alas! found it at the same time more difficult and more ne-

cessary to enact the character at home, than abroad, for Sir Philip watched her with cruel vigilance, and whenever she sought refuge in silence, or that her features exhibited more than usual melancholy, he invariably found means to disguise some galling allusion in commonplace terms, so that it might be understood by her only, who was sensibly alive to every wound he inflicted. She was even now denied the comfort of being alone ; for Lady Courtenay, by her husband's suggestions, was continually breaking in upon that solitude which had hitherto proved the greatest relief to Blanch's harassed mind ; and under these circumstances she found herself more at liberty in the midst of a crowd, though even here, the constant presence of Lord Dalmaine distressed her. It was about this time that an incident occurred which occasioned no slight degree of excitement within the palace-walls. Two young relatives of his majesty were on a visit to their august kinsman, and during their sojourn at Hampton Court, Lord Dalmaine was appointed as their escort and guide, an office for which



he was well calculated, and which he performed to the satisfaction of the royal youths, who were not a little interested in the numerous historical anecdotes with which the young nobleman illustrated his description of the old palace. The audience-hall attracted their particular attention, and became doubly interesting on Lord Dalmaine's mentioning that some of Shakspeare's most admired productions had been represented there for the first time. This led to a discussion upon the drama and the merits of the apartment when considered as a theatre, which was followed by a respectful suggestion to his majesty, and concluded by his authorizing the young nobleman to fit up the hall immediately and engage an eminent company of players.

The day was fixed, and under the management of the enthusiastic Dalmaine every thing was ready at the appointed time. He looked forward to the hour with joy, for he had lately been unavoidably separated from Blanch, but this evening he determined to enjoy the meed of his labours by her side.

At the given hour the guests were all as-

sembled, and the doors at the end of the hall being thrown open, George the First attended by his household entered the theatre and ascended the throne amid the loyal acclamations of his subjects. The foreign princes sat on his right hand, and the officers of state, with their wives and daughters, took their respective stations near the king. A hasty description of a scene which history has not disdained to commemorate, may not be ill-placed in this narrative. The throne and canopy were of the same costly velvet as decorated several compartments of the walls, while innumerable lamps were cunningly introduced into the rich fretwork of the ceiling. The procenium was fully illuminated, and the oriel window where Surrey and his fair Geraldine were said to have held sweet converse, was studded with lamps that gave the appearance of stained glass to the panes, while the body of the theatre received no light excepting from above. On one side a gallery hung with tapestry and damask of gorgeous colours, was filled with ladies in full court attire, some of whom were both young

and beautiful. The musicians were concealed, and immediately before the stage there was an open space, designed, as Lord Dalmaine expressed it, to separate the real from the ideal world. Ensconced in the recess of the oriel window by the side of Blanch, and proud in the anticipation of the pleasure which would be afforded her, he only wished that the countenance of her he loved would lose that melancholy which surprised while it alarmed him.

At length the music commenced, and every voice was hushed, as the curtain rose slowly; while Blanch, turning to her companion, with an air of indifference inquired, for the first time, what he had selected for that night's representation.

"His majesty," replied Dalmaine, "having left the choice to me, I thought it best to open the theatre with the magnificent tragedy of Henry the Eighth, in consideration of the principal character having been the original founder of these walls."

The beauty of the language, the superiority of the acting, and the novelty of the whole, did not fail to excite Blanch's admiration, and she occasionally expressed her opinions on the subject to Lord Dalmaine, who, notwithstanding, experienced much disappointment at the total absence of that enthusiasm which he expected. But as the play advanced, and the matchless character of Queen Katherine was powerfully and feelingly sustained by a woman who looked and played the part to perfection, then gradually and insensibly Blanch's feelings were awakened, while her sorrow owned a sympathy with that of the unfortunate queen. She listened with earnest admiration to the beautiful, dignified, and feminine defence which Katherine offered to her oppressors: her heart swelled with indignation as she heard the vows which the inconstant Henry breathed in the ear of Anne Boleyn; but when the affecting interview between the abandoned queen and the cardinals took place, Blanch could no longer restrain her emotion. Echoing the words of the

actress in a low, but emphatic voice, she exclaimed,

“ He has my heart yet, and shall have my prayers  
While I shall have my life: ”

Lord Dalmaine heard her ! He had watched every shade that had passed over her features : he had remarked every passage that excited her interest ; and suspicion forced itself upon his mind :—she loved another ! Sir Philip had compelled or persuaded her to accept him : and yet—how could that be, when he recalled the affection which her father’s language had displayed ? He could not speak : indeed he knew not what to say. But suddenly he was attracted by her unusual agitation, which at this moment could have no affinity with the scene then acting, for it was inferior both in interest and representation ; and yet Blanch trembled !

He bent forward to see if she were ill, and perceived that her eyes were rivetted on the opposite corner of the room. There stood a man of an extraordinary appearance ; his dress, which was black, was of a style totally opposed

to the fashion of the day, the peculiarity of which, combined with his enormous stature, rendered him the most conspicuous object in the room. He leaned against the door by which the court had entered; no one appeared to know or speak to him, and yet he was allowed to remain in that position, although two yeomen of the guard were stationed at the entrance. There were a few whispers and a few glances, which were quickly suppressed by his majesty's turning inquiringly in that direction.

The stranger's eyes, however, were fixed upon Blanch Courtenay with an indescribable expression, which none but that eye, peculiar and extraordinary as it was, could assume.

It appeared to Lord Dalmaine that the unknown was a man between fifty and sixty; his hair and beard, which were worn in the fashion of Henry the Fourth of France, were nearly gray, and his broad forehead showed many furrows: but his eye had forgotten to grow old; it had resisted the power of time, and remained unaltered amid surrounding changes.

As he gazed, Lord Dalmaine fancied that the

stranger made a sign to Blanch, and unable to contain himself any longer, he inquired abruptly, if she could inform him who it was that stood opposite.

Blanch looked embarrassed, but her negative was decided, and her lover's heart sank within him, for he believed that her answer was a falsehood.

“His attention to yourself,” he observed, sharply, “appeared to be authorized by old acquaintance; but perhaps he requires to be admonished on some points of etiquette, and informed that it is not the custom in England, to fix his gaze upon one lady for so long a time together. By Heavens!” he cried, starting up as he spoke, for the curtain had now fallen, and the court was already on the move, “by Heavens! I will teach him that such insolence is not to be tolerated.”

“My lord,” said Blanch, laying her hand upon his arm, and speaking earnestly, “I must request you will not subject me to ridicule on so trifling a cause; the stranger may assert that his observation was directed to the window in

which I sat—to the person next me, and a thousand other excuses, which it would be impossible to refute.”

“He dare not,” replied Dalmaine. “At this very moment his eyes are fixed upon you. I will not brook such insolent conduct.”

“Lord Dalmaine,” rejoined Blanch, “I must request that you will not act in direct opposition to my wishes, in an affair that concerns me alone.”

“Miss Courtenay,” replied her companion, in a tone of wounded feeling, “you shall be obeyed; and as this affair concerns yourself alone, I will not take upon myself to chastise an insolence that is, apparently, agreeable to you.”

He bowed haughtily, and advanced towards the king, who was now bidding Sir Philip and Lady Courtenay good night. In order to reach their apartments sooner, they had to cross the hall, and descend by the large staircase which connects the two principal courts, and was the common egress for the guests in general. A few moments passed in compliments and congratulations with different people, and when



Dalmaine next turned his head, he perceived the Courtenays traversing the hall, closely followed by the mysterious stranger. Enraged beyond measure, he determined to pursue them; but, at that moment, the chamberlain stepped forward, and informed him that the king was inquiring for Lord Dalmaine. George the First linked his arm in that of the young courtier, and commencing a discussion on the entertainment, carried him off captive through the private entrance.

Blanch, in the mean time, contrived to keep the stranger in view until she reached the door. Here the crowd was too great; but, as she descended the staircase, she felt a gentle touch upon her arm, and, turning round, she heard her name pronounced by a low deep voice, but so distinct in all its tones, that not a word escaped her ear.

“Blanch Courtenay,” it said, “if William Clifford be still dear to you, meet me to-morrow night, by ten o’clock, at the end of the Lime Grove, near the river.”

“Blanch, are you coming, my love,” said

Lady Courtenay. “ See, Philip, there is the man I spoke of, just behind her. Do tell me who he is, and why he was admitted in that mysterious manner.”

“ My dear Catherine,” replied her husband, laughing with an air of importance and secrecy, “ you had better try and examine Walpole on the subject: how he got here I don’t believe any of them could tell; and why his majesty’s ministry think proper to be so vastly civil to him, is, of course, only known to themselves—though we, humble individuals, may have our own ideas upon the subject.”

CHAPTER XIII.

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THE whole of the next day was passed by Blanch in a state of anxious excitement,—not of hesitation, for she was resolved at all hazards to meet a man who adjured her by a name so dear. She dreaded, nevertheless, the obstacles which would in all probability present themselves. But all, on the contrary, appeared to further her designs: her father dined with the king; and Lady Courtenay, fatigued by the exertions of the preceding evening, retired early to rest. Shortly after, Blanch stole to her own apartment, and throwing over her head one of those black silk hoods which were then so generally worn, and were not unfavourable to disguise; she descended the stairs with a noiseless tread. Passing through the gloomy and dimly-lighted cloisters, she trembled at

every step, and started at her own shadow, even though well aware that most of the inhabitants were at that moment in attendance on the king, and at all events there were few likely to be abroad at so late an hour on a winter's night. There was a severe struggle in her bosom, however. She knew that in the eyes of the world—even of the merciful portion—such a proceeding would be condemned. She shuddered to think of the construction that might be put on her conduct; and yet, in her own opinion, duty on this occasion pointed the same way as inclination. Hope, too, the guide of all beings, whose persuasive eloquence is so rarely resisted, was busy with a thousand suggestions, which Blanch endeavoured to silence, but in vain, and quitting the palace, she paused a moment to gaze on the scene before her.

The gardens had ever been her frequent resort, but when glittering and brilliant in the noonday sun, or glowing with the warm and mellow tints he bequeathed at his setting, they never appeared so beautiful, so fairy-like, to Blanch, as beneath the influence of a moonlight sky.

There was something, indeed, both in their forms and their colouring, particularly adapted to this sweet and “stilly hour.” The fantastic outline of the evergreens traced in dark relief upon the sky, lent themselves to many a vague and poetic dream, in which fancy loves to indulge, while the liquid music of the fountains fell soothingly upon the ear. The water springing upwards, caught the moonbeams as they fell, tossing them to and fro in familiar sport, and scattering their broken lustre over the whole of the little basin. On one side rose the dark pile of the building, throwing its deep shadow on the broad terrace; and on the other, the boundary of high trees, which even at this season, when stripped of their verdure, added to the beauty of the general effect. Here and there too, under the shade of some mournful yew, the pure white urn, of graceful workmanship, caught the eye, looking like the peaceful grave of the departed. But one of the peculiar characteristics of the spot, was that night remarkable — its summer-like aspect. That bright season might deck it with those lovely superfluities, of which it would be in turn dis-

sessed by winter ; but on a bright and genial day, as the eye dwelt upon the luxuriant grass, and ever-verdant laurel and yew which adorn the border, it would not have been difficult to have cheated oneself into the sweet belief, that summer was still lingering in a spot so beautiful.

The absence of those lovely songs, which had charmed Blanch in her earlier walks, and the chilliness of the air, alone reminded her that the sweet season had passed away. The notes of the nightingale were exchanged for the shrill hooting of the owl, which, together with the baying of a watch-dog, and the measured tread of the sentinels, alone broke the stillness of the night.

Blanch stood gazing for a moment on the fountain, with her mind agitated by a thousand conflicting and opposite feelings, till the mellow tones of the palace clock, echoed by the bells of the neighbouring village, warned her that the hour of rendezvous was arrived. Traversing the grass parterre, she entered the lime avenue, and found the stranger standing on the appointed spot.

“ I am come,” she began, “ according to your

summons, but before I can listen to one word, you must prove that I am not mistaken in my conjectures, by revealing your name."

"The name of Dumont," he replied, "is not unfamiliar to you, at least if I have been rightly informed on the subject."

"M. Dumont!" exclaimed Blanch, with a quiet earnestness that at once convinced her companion of the depth of feeling which dictated every word. "Since the time that I left Bordeaux, sorrow, doubt, and disappointment, have been my portion; and at the moment that I most need advice and consolation, there is no one to afford me either. The melancholy situation in which I am placed alone induces me to hazard a step that, if discovered, would expose me to undoubted censure. We have never met before, but one, on whose word I loved to place implicit reliance, made you known to me. I appeal to your honour, to your generosity,—you are dealing with a young and inexperienced woman, whose conduct must, and whose destiny may, depend upon your answer. Let that answer be dictated by the strictest veracity, let

neither compassion for me, nor friendship for another, lead you to withhold any part of the truth. Tell me," she added, gazing earnestly in his face, while the hope against which she struggled cast a momentary beam over her features, "Tell me, if I must learn from his example, to forget—tell me if I must teach myself the hard and bitter task, to consider William Clifford unworthy of my love?"

She bent forward anxiously, eagerly, she endeavoured to anticipate his answer, for every second appeared an hour.

"Rather," replied Dumont, "consider him as a redeeming instance, in this world of falsehood—as one who has staked life and fortune in the cause of friendship—and who, surrounded by all that could captivate and inthral the heart of man, has never wandered, even in thought, from that vow which he breathed to Blanch Courtenay, before the voice of a designing world had taught her to question and mistrust the actions of William Clifford!"

Oh! for words to express the ecstasy with which she listened—the implicit faith which she



placed in Dumont's assertion. Blanch had heard the most conclusive evidence from Stanley ; she had read a repetition of the intelligence, in Miss Bellenden's letters ; and yet an assertion from the lips of a stranger, without proof, without explanation, had the power to produce instant conviction. Fond, but blessed credulity, she shared Dumont's indignation, though she herself was its object, and thanked him in her heart for the reproof his speech implied. " Oh ! repeat those words," she said, " that I may live over again the last few moments. I did not know, indeed, I did not know that such rapture was in store for me. But let me not interrupt you ; set my mind at rest—my heart is nearly so already."

" Lady," said Dumont, " I scarcely wonder that your life should be one of disappointment, if you give such prompt credence to the most opposite assertions ; but I, at least, will not deceive you. The detail of William Clifford's adventures in Paris, would be too long for me to give, were I willing to deprive him of the pleasure he will experience in relating them

himself. With the blessing of Heaven his arrival will be speedy; but, as you demand the whole truth, it is incumbent on me to inform you, that the dangers and difficulties in which he has lately been involved, are not yet at an end, and there is still a possibility of delay."

Blanch looked up, and Dumont hastened to reply to her tacit inquiries. "I scarcely know how to tell you that my deliverance is owing to William Clifford, who remained in the dungeon, which the residence of a few weeks longer would have converted into my tomb. Do me the justice to believe, that I would never have consented to this plan, had I not been convinced of the practicability of his escape. Should the scheme which we concerted together fail, he has a friend at court, who will risk every thing to save him;—and, I need scarcely tell you that, in the last extremity, they will willingly accept the exchange that I shall offer in my own person."

"But the suspense!" exclaimed Blanch, her voice faltering as she spoke, "when shall we know how it has ended?"

“Soon,” replied her companion; “many days will not elapse before I hear from one to whom William’s safety is as dear as to you or to myself.”

There was a pause; and Blanch knew not how to clothe the inquiry which she longed to make.

“This friend at court,” she began, “is then deeply interested in William’s fate?”

Dumont bent his searching eye upon her.

“You have heard,” he said, “of Mirabel de Bernay?”

“Yes,” replied Blanch, with much embarrassment; “I have heard of her as one whom the virtuous do not love.”

As she uttered these words, Dumont’s countenance assumed a sternness that almost amounted to passion. His brow knit, and his eye rolled:—

“Cursed!” he cried, “be those who invented so gross a calumny against the best and noblest of her sex—the pure, the noble, the high-minded Mirabel! When will the vile and worthless refrain from slandering that virtue and excellence of which they are incapable? If

to watch over the safety of others—if to surmount the cowardice of her sex, and hazard all she values in the cause of benevolence—if to sacrifice every interested and selfish feeling for the sake of one she loves—if this be guilt, then is Mirabel de Bernay most culpable ! Yet stay: she has committed another error ; one that the pride of woman will not pass lightly over : she has stooped to love—to centre the affections of her whole heart on William Clifford. But do not wrong her : that love is as pure, and holy, though not so blest, as yours. And mark me, Blanch Courtenay, this woman, of whom you thought so lightly, from the day that every hope of her young heart was crushed by the discovery of William's attachment to another—from that very day, the whole energy of her noble nature was exerted against her own interests. Day by day, and hour by hour, did Mirabel work unceasingly to restore William to her rival. And even while rejoicing in his presence, she scorned to exercise that influence which her beauty, her talents, and her devoted affection might have acquired over the heart of any human being.

“ I distress you,” he added, after a pause ; “ I have spoken harshly, perhaps, and beg your forgiveness ; but the necessity of vindicating those two, whom I esteem the most on earth, appears so strange—so—”

“ Oh, no ! ” interrupted Blanch ; “ you have spoken well and nobly, and I alone have been to blame. Yet I knew not what to believe, or whom to trust. Alas ! alas ! my heart bleeds for her ! What consolation can there be in store for one whose situation is so melancholy ? ”

“ Much ! ” exclaimed Dumont, with calm enthusiasm ; “ much, in retrospection. The present—the future—must be blanks in her existence : but the glorious past !—it will remain a shining light, shedding its distant brightness over her otherwise sad and solitary path.”

There was another long pause, and Blanch reflecting that every moment was precious, and that she had still much to learn, inquired of Dumont, by what means he had discovered her in the crowd, on the preceding evening.

“ I might reply,” he said, “ by putting the same question to yourself. Nevertheless,” he

added, with a smile, "I have always found William's descriptions true to nature; but even had I no such guide, there was a circumstance which would instantly identify you in my eyes. Yesterday evening you wore a portrait studded with diamonds, on your bosom."

"I did so," she replied. "You may have perhaps seen it in William's possession; it is the picture of his mother."

"That miniature!" exclaimed Dumont, suppressing the emotion which these associations awakened, "was painted at my request; it was the pledge of one, who, as she gave it, renewed the vow, which, after the lapse of a few months, was repeated with shameless falsehood in the ear of another. You, who now possess it, who have read the inscription dictated by a false and ephemeral sentiment, which she dared to confound with that exalted passion of which her nature was incapable—you, I say, may blush to know, that one of your own sex, and the mother of William Clifford, should act so basely by a man whose whole heart was devoted to her from early youth. To you, Marguerite," he

cried, “ may every error, every misfortune of my after life be ascribed—to you whose falsehood drove me to seek forgetfulness in that wide world, whose promises, like your own, only dazzled to betray. Forgive me !” he added, turning towards Blanch. “ This is a subject on which I never speak—on which I have never spoken to William Clifford. The first evening of our acquaintance the resemblance struck me forcibly ; and strange as it may appear, I felt an interest in the son of her whose memory is hateful to me. But it was his own superior qualities, and noble disposition, that cemented the friendship founded on so slight and unwarrantable a basis. I have never mentioned his mother’s name to William Clifford, but I have been told, ay, and I believe, and hope it, that her life was one of remorse, disappointment, and sorrow ! Your gentle nature,” he added, observing that Blanch was distressed by his violence, “ cannot compass the joy which such an intelligence awakened. Pardon me—I have been led to deviate from the original subject of our discourse, and yet, in

my mind, there exists much affinity between them."

He changed his tone and manner, he spoke once more cheeringly of the prospect of Clifford's speedy arrival, and the reflection that her lover was, perhaps, at that moment in captivity, could hardly check the joyous overflowings of Blanch's heart. She thanked Dumont, she murmured a few words of faint apology for the tears she could no longer control.

Her companion watched her with kind interest. "I love to see a woman weep," he said, "when her tears flow from a pure and warrantable source—they must be sweet comforters, those bright drops that glisten in the moonlight. But this means of consolation, like almost every other, has ever been denied me !"

"Would," exclaimed Blanch, "that it lay in my power to reward you for all the consolation you have afforded me. Tell me, before I go, that you acquit me of all harshness towards that noble being, who is far, far more worthy than myself, to be beloved by William ; and, above all, let me entreat you to remember that I rely on you alone for intelligence."



“Go, then,” said Dumont, “and trust to me; this suspense cannot last much longer.”

They parted hastily, for the clock now warned them of the lateness of the hour.

Blanch flew down the walk, but as she retraced her way over the grass, she heard the footsteps of a man on the terrace, and her heart beat quick and hard. She looked carefully from behind the screen of shrubs which encircle the grass parterres, to discover who it was, and, to her dismay, she recognised Dalmaine. The act of drawing back hastily attracted his attention—he crossed the border and stood by her side.

“This is a cold night, and a late hour,” he began in a tone that induced her to believe she was not yet discovered, “for a fair damsel to be walking forth unattended.”

She did not reply, except by drawing her hood more closely round her face, and quickening her pace towards the palace. But Lord Dalmaine was not so easily deterred from his purpose, and he continued.

“She who goes out alone, at this late hour,

to meet a man whom she saw yesterday for the first time, need not scruple to indulge such an old acquaintance as myself, with a few moments' conversation."

As he spoke, he placed himself before her path, and Blanch finding that any attempt at further concealment would be useless, replied at once:—

"Let me pass, Lord Dalmaine; another time I may justify my conduct, but this is not the moment or the place to do so."

"By Heavens! it shall be," he cried, eagerly, as he once more shifted his position to impede her progress. "Mark me well, any attempt to quit this spot, until you have accounted for being here, will prove fruitless."

"I do not merit such treatment," rejoined Blanch, in a tone of expostulation, "and must beg to remind you, that common courtesy should, at all times, be practised by a man to a woman, even though appearances may condemn her in his eyes."

"Not so," he replied, "when you give me, by conduct which I will leave your own heart

to name, so great an advantage, you can hardly expect me not to use it—and whatever be the consequence to you or me, I repeat, that you shall not leave this spot till this is explained.”

Thus saying, he laid his hand on her wrist, with less gentleness than was usual to him, and Blanch endeavoured to disengage it, but in vain. Alarmed and agitated as she was, the indignation which Dalmaine’s conduct excited, supported her.

“Release my hand, Lord Dalmaine!” she exclaimed, with dignity, “and tell me by what authority you pretend to question or control my actions?”

“Deceitful, heartless girl!” cried Dalmaine, without relaxing his grasp, “have I been made the sport of your vanity for so long a time, to be rewarded by insult and mockery at last? Have you the effrontery to speak in this manner, to one with whose affection you have so basely trifled?”

“As God is my witness!” she replied, with deep emotion, “I have never trifled with the affections of any human being upon earth.”

“Blanch Courtenay,” exclaimed her companion, leading her a few paces forward into the open moonlight, “answer me, if you have the slightest regard for that truth which you so often and so zealously uphold, what excuse can be found for the conduct of a woman whom, neither regard for herself, nor for him to whom she has plighted her vows, can withhold from going out, in the dead of night, to meet a man that, yesterday, she did not blush to affirm, was an utter stranger?”

“I am not surprised,” she replied, “that such a proceeding should incur your censure; but, as I have hitherto enjoyed your good opinion, let me entreat you, not only to suspend your judgment, but also to believe, that love for my future husband alone, prompted a step, which you would be the last to condemn, were I at liberty to divulge the circumstances connected with it.”

Dalmaine heard her with mingled sorrow and resentment—he released her hand. “Go,” he said, “I will detain you no longer than to express my gratitude to one who has undeceived me, before it was too late.”

His lip quivered; and in a tone of bitter irony he added, "Accept my best thanks for such an undoubted proof of affection—for that enthusiastic love which shows itself under a novel and eccentric form—"

"You wrong me, Lord Dalmaine," continued Blanch, whose suspicion of the truth had been suddenly roused by his last speech; "the day I was made acquainted with your sentiments, you were informed, by my desire, of an engagement which was contracted before I ever knew you, or became the object of an affection which I could not return. Yet believe me, there is no one, after him who occupies my heart, that I admire—that I esteem—as much as yourself—whose friendship is more precious, or whose kindness is more valued. Do not say I have trifled with you; do not believe that one who loves as I do, could be ungrateful, or regardless of your disinterested attachment—of your forgiving and generous nature."

She spoke with much feeling; but her words fell with a sad and melancholy sound on Dalmaine's ear. He was silent for a few seconds,

for the blow he had received was no slight one, while a thousand convincing circumstances forced themselves upon his mind, showing him that he had been deceived.

Alas ! how one word can destroy that fabric of hope and joy, in the construction of which so many bright and blessed moments have been passed ; and can scatter at our feet the ruins of that sweet imaginary future which fancy laid out for our after home — ruins that obtrude themselves on our view like the memory of the past, only to aggravate the sorrow of to-day.

“And whom,” Dalmaine at length inquired, “did you depute to inform me of your previous engagement ?”

“My father,” she replied, with a vague dread ; “my father, who bore your message to myself.”

“Blanch,” said her companion, “we have both been cruelly, shamefully deceived ; for I — I was led to believe you had accepted me !”

Blanch was silent, but the blood of her noble

race rose in her veins, as the fact of her father's falsehood flashed suddenly upon her.

"And my mother?" she inquired, hesitatingly.

"And your mother—she also lent herself to this infamous deception!"

"Then," cried the agitated girl, "then I am indeed friendless and forsaken!"

"Do not say so, Blanch," replied Dalmaine, sadly; "I will be your friend and protector, until he who has a right to be both, arrives to claim you. Let there no longer be any mystery between us. If your natural supporters fail, confide in me, and you shall never have cause to repent it. Miserable as this intelligence has made me, it is a consolation to think that I have not been deceived in you.—Do not weep so bitterly, dearest Blanch," he added tenderly; "if I am not blest enough to add to your happiness, do not let me believe I have caused you any sorrow. Lean on me, and we will return to your home. You tremble sadly—I feel your tears falling on my hand. Fear no-

thing, Blanch : my promise of protection was not lightly given."

They walked on in silence.

"May God bless you!" exclaimed the weeping Blanch, as she took leave of Dalmaine at the foot of her turret staircase. "May God bless you! and oh, may he reward you for this noble conduct."



CHAPTER XIV.

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DURING the course of the next day, Blanch found means to converse at length with Dalmaine, whom she referred, for every particular, to Dumont, after having explained, in a few words, the circumstances which connected him so intimately with her betrothed husband. She intrusted Dalmaine with some hasty lines for the stranger, entreating his unlimited confidence for the bearer. Dalmaine's noble and candid deportment, the unpretending manner in which he proffered his assistance, and the generous and kind-hearted language he held with regard to Blanch, produced its natural effect upon the mind of Dumont. He withheld nothing that might excite the young nobleman's

interest, and letting him further into the secret than Blanch herself, obtained a promise that he would exert his personal influence with the king to obtain the restoration of the Clifford estates.

It might be about two days after the adventure in the garden, that Sir Philip Courtenay took his accustomed way towards the king's writing-closet. He was, however, checked in his progress, and requested, by the page, to await his majesty's commands in the antechamber. This he did for some time, very patiently walking up and down, examining every picture in the room, observing the hanging of the curtains, and taking a careful survey of the grounds from the window, till, wearied by expectation, he at length fell into a deep train of thought, chiefly upon domestic concerns, wondering how much longer Blanch's patience would hold out, and lulling himself into the belief that his plan would prove successful in the end.

He looked at his watch—three quarters of an hour had elapsed!—the door opened, and the mysterious stranger, whose appearance at the

theatre had caused such a sensation, entered the room. Sir Philip considered this, however, as a fortunate incident, and approaching the unknown with a bland smile, had already prepared some flattering speech; when, to his surprise, the door of his majesty's closet was opened, and the stranger, with a slight inclination of the head, passed on, without remark or observation, into the royal presence.

Sir Philip's meditations took a new turn, and he felt that unpleasing sensation which the busy and the curious ever experience when any event is in agitation, without the possibility of their interference. Another long quarter of an hour passed, and Lord Dalmaine entered the room; Courtenay received him with easy familiarity, but the young man's demeanour was cold, distant, and haughty; and in a few moments he also received a summons from his majesty.

Sir Philip's vexation was now at its height; that a private audience should be granted to the foreigner was not extraordinary, but why so young a man as Dalmaine, one who had never

taken a leading part in politics, why he should be admitted to the conference, was indeed incomprehensible. A vague dread of having in some involuntary manner, forfeited the king's good will, startled Sir Philip as it rose before him, and indeed his suspicions appeared confirmed by Dalmaine's manner, which, judging from his own feelings, was peculiarly adapted to those whose favour was on the decline. Added to these pleasurable reflections, the baronet's curiosity was wrought to a pitch of irritability, while the conference in the next room was carried on in a most tantalising tone of voice. He fancied he could detect when the discourse took an explanatory or persuasive turn, but not a word reached his ear. At length he heard the chairs pushed aside, he heard steps advancing, and a hand laid upon the lock of the door, then a fine clear voice uttered these words, to which Courtenay listened in breathless anxiety.

“ I receive your majesty's promise as an indemnification for all I may have done and suffered. Henceforth I mingle no more in this

world's politics. I leave a scene where I have acted a busy and a painful part, but with one great satisfaction : I have found friendship in one man, and generosity in another, and above all, I have found gratitude, even in a monarch."

The door opened, and the foreigner, followed by Dalmaine, passed through the room, slightly acknowledging Sir Philip as they did so. To crown the baronet's mortification, the page informed him, in their hearing, that his majesty could not admit any one else during the remainder of the day. Disappointed and crest-fallen, Sir Philip returned to his own apartments, and as he did so, beheld the two others walking arm in arm, engaged in a most animated discussion.

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Leaving Sir Philip to digest his vexation at leisure, we must not only transport the reader once more to the shores of France, but even lead him back to the memorable day of Dumont's escape.

The shades of evening had already invested the earth, but darkness, utter darkness, had for

some hours filled the solitary dungeon in which William Clifford was confined. His native daring and sanguine temperament had effectually sustained him, during the period of suspense which intervened from the departure of Dumont, till the appointed moment when the second escape was to be attempted. But when the struggle was over, when the cries of the gaoler brought several comrades to his assistance, and Clifford, though striving for a moment with all the courage of despair, was overpowered by numbers—when bound by the heaviest fetters which that abode of oppression afforded, and with his arms tightly pinioned, he was dragged from the cell which Dumont had occupied, and thrust into a lower and a smaller dungeon, there to remain until the regent's pleasure should be known—then did he, indeed, experience sensations hitherto totally unfamiliar to him. He stood in utter darkness,—but what was darkness to him, save that the moments appeared to crawl more heavily in the absence of all light, and that every moment, as it passed, brought a fresh pang to his heart?

His plan had failed—that plan on which every thing had been staked; and the discovery had been so speedy, that, in all probability, Dumont himself would not escape detection. Blanch! his faithful Blanch, too, who was at that moment braving her father's wrath for his sake—Blanch! who would know that her letter had been delivered, and would attribute his silence to a different cause—might she not be driven at length to listen to the suit of another, and obey her father, and avenge what she might well consider her slighted love, at the same moment? And Mirabel! The reflections connected with her were doubly bitter, for regret was mingled with apprehension on her account. He reproached himself for not having sufficiently exerted the influence he possessed, by engaging her to provide for her own safety in the manner he had at first proposed. Yet a single moment's consideration might have convinced him that the attempt would have been unsuccessful, however frequently, and however pressingly, it had been urged. But his mind was in no state to reason

clearly. William knew her well indeed, but that knowledge alarmed him the more. Had her resolution been weaker, her affection less firm, the first impulse, at least, might have been to ensure her own pardon; but could William have overheard every syllable that had passed between her and the regent, his judgment of her conduct could not have been more correct.

He foresaw every thing, indeed, that was painful. He felt convinced that the Duke of Orleans would not lose that opportunity to visit her pride severely upon her head. He dreaded to think of the ordeal to which her high spirit and her noble heart would be subjected; and, above all, he shuddered at the thought that the intensity of her grief might betray that secret which she had so long and so carefully concealed, and expose her to the scorn of a depraved prince and a libertine court. How those feelings, naturally liable to excitement, would stand such fearful trials, he could not picture to himself; but one thing at least was certain, Mirabel de Bernay could never be inactive at such a moment, and any exertion on



her part, he saw but too clearly, would, in all probability, prove fatal to both. Whichever way he turned to look, misery to himself and those he loved best met his eyes. Every thing was despair ! The thought of speedy death to one for whom life still possessed every charm, was not rendered more grateful by the reflection that that death would be ignominious—if such a term could ever be applied to the death of the noble and the good. But no ! the block, the axe, the headsman, the gaping multitude, are but mere accessories ; it is the inward feeling that makes the hero, even though chance may rob his name of the glory which it merits.

The scaffold ! How many instances are there upon record where those, whom tyranny and oppression have selected as their victims, have made the scaffold as brilliant a field for intrepidity, as that on which the warrior breathes his last, with the shout of victory in his dying ear, and the laurels of fame already descending upon his chilly brow ! But Clifford could not argue thus. If he died, he died in a

private cause, without any of those stirring incidents which would ensure his name an honourable place upon the page of history. Far from it—he well knew there was no one in the world beside Dumont who would regard, in a favourable light, the sacrifice he had made. If he died, would not his very memory be hateful to Blanch—would she not say, with truth, under the very best view of the case—that love had been subservient to friendship; that the life of Dumont had been more precious in his sight than the happiness he professed to covet? And the report of his attachment to Mirabel, which must have reached her—what must be the stain it would leave upon his memory in her eyes? Who could then undeceive her—who then convince her that William's heart had never faltered in its truth? Death, merely as death, Clifford feared as little as any man, but that which was in store for him, was not calculated to raise any feelings but those of disgust within his mind.

We mourn the fate of those, who at an early

age, are borne to the tomb by some fatal disease, just at the period, when life wears its most promising colours; but the progressive decay of the frame, the kind and soothing attentions of those who surround the dying bed, all conduce to the gradual resignation of the mind, and the preparation of the soul for its departure. Not so the sudden doom, the sentence pronounced by a fellow mortal, which in an instant snaps asunder the myriad ties that bind us to life, in the spring of youth and vigour. Clifford believed that in the eyes of heaven the deed he had done would prove acceptable; he had beheld the victim of injustice (for such had he ever considered Dumont) a being whom he loved, and honoured, sinking beneath the horrors of prolonged captivity, and he had stretched out a hand to save him; but in the disturbed state of his mind, even the consciousness of having acted nobly, could not sustain him. Philosophy, nay the only true, the only lovely philosophy; that religion to which Clifford had ever had recourse in former trials, seemed now to forsake him. There was

a heavy lassitude upon him, an entire depression, his heart had lost its buoyancy, his spirit its elasticity. The excitement he had undergone, the failure of his long cherished scheme, the disappointment, the extinction of all his hopes, every thing combined to weigh him down, to overpower him, to prostrate soul and body. After standing for more than an hour in contemplation, if that could be called contemplation, which was agony and confusion ; he resolved to walk across the dungeon to a spot where the light of the gaoler's lantern had shown him a stone seat, but he forgot how he was bound. The chain round his ancles was too short to admit the usual free movement of his limbs, and as he attempted to advance, he fell, dashing his head against the stone pavement. He struggled up and seated himself on the block of stone, which had borne many of his unhappy predecessors, but bodily pain was now added to mental anguish, his head swam and he fell fainting on the floor of the dungeon.

How long a time had elapsed he had not the remotest idea, when the sounds of footsteps,

and the withdrawing of bolts recalled him to consciousness. Clifford required no other incentive to exertion, than the knowledge of the satisfaction which his oppressors would derive from the sight of his despair. He rose with difficulty, and prepared to meet the person who was about to enter with composure. There was a charm indeed in the rusty grinding of the bolts, for in Clifford's eyes, any event would be preferable to the dreadful time he had lately passed. Still it was an awful moment, for death and torture might tread upon the heels of those who were now entering.

## CHAPTER XV.

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THE door was at length opened, and two gaolers entered, the first of whom bore a lantern, with which he scrutinized the prisoner's countenance for a moment, and then bade him follow. William had of course neither the power nor the inclination to disobey; and after threading innumerable passages, he found himself in a large square room, which was set apart for the examination of prisoners. The governor was pacing up and down, with a far different expression from the smiling urbanity with which he had greeted the Baronne de Bernay at the gate of the chateau. On the other side, with some show of state, was seated one of those officers of law, or petty

judges, termed the *maîtres de requêtes*. Behind a small table sat his secretary; and beside him the witnesses, some of whom bore evident marks of Clifford's resistance. The man of law's countenance was shrewd and fierce, and it brightened on the entrance of the young Englishman, as if in anticipation of pleasure of some kind to be derived from the exercise of his functions. He gazed steadily upon the prisoner for a moment or two, and then, with a stern and contracted brow, he said,

“It is needless to inform you of the cause for which you are summoned, or of the charge which is now preferred against you. The providential discovery of the base and hateful conspiracy, in which you have so long been implicated, the failure of the ill-conceived and ill-executed scheme, which, in conjunction with others——” he paused, and repeated the word, throwing a strong emphasis into his tone,—  
“others, whose peculiar position should have deterred from treasonable practices:—the failure, as I before observed, of your mutual

scheme, has this day subjected both of you to the extreme penalty of the law; and his highness, whose name is synonymous with justice and equity! has invested me with full power to examine into the motives which prompted you to so flagrant a breach of those duties you necessarily owe to the country in which you reside. The Duke of Orleans, whose clemency you have already reason to know is ever willing to afford opportunity for defence and exculpation, nevertheless, has commanded me to inform you, that the slightest deviation from a faithful statement of facts, the slightest attempt at withholding one particle of the truth, will not only draw down upon you the speedy execution of the ultimate punishment assigned by law to such offences, but may beforehand lead to that terrible and ignominious, but necessary means of extracting the truth."

He dropped his voice, as if his own mind were filled with a painful sensation of awe, at the allusion to the torture which he was forced to make, but William's features, according to



the command which he had imposed on them, betrayed not the shadow of a change. It was indeed wonderful how his ever-varying countenance could assume, for so long a time, a character of cold and calm indifference. He listened attentively, but with perfect tranquillity: and his demeanour could never have led any one to divine the subject of the discourse to which he gave ear.

The speaker, whose aim was evidently by one means or another to inspire an awe that verged upon terror, was disappointed at the small effect his words produced upon the prisoner.

“Advance!” he said, raising his tone. “You are accused of having aided and abetted the escape of one of the principal prisoners of state, with whom you have been in constant, though clandestine correspondence, for several months past. Indeed, since the autumn of last year, at Bordeaux, when under the lax and unwarrantable government of the late General de Brissac, you were admitted to constant interviews with the prisoner called Du-

mont, you there, it is proved, commenced that system of treasonable communication which you have since carried on in Paris. Taking advantage of the generous hospitality of the royal family, you have most dishonourably played the spy upon their words and actions, and conveyed to the prisoner in Vincennes, those details which might conduce to the success of his treasonable purposes."

The maître de requêtes paused, after having thus announced to Clifford the charge against him; and, leaning back in his chair, he fixed his keen and searching eyes upon the prisoner, inquiring if he had any thing to reply?

"Undoubtedly," said William, with perfect composure, "by asserting that the statement you have made is totally without foundation!" The magistrate shook his head, and wished from his heart, the prisoner might be able to prove it clearly. He then proceeded, however, to recapitulate the accounts which he had received from the governor, gaolers, and sentinels, of the first visit which William had paid, in company with the Baronne de Bernay; and

the second, which had terminated in the escape of Dumont, and the detention of Clifford, to whom he once more applied for an explanation of the separate motives, which induced the baronne and himself to be guilty of an act of treason.

“ I have made up my mind,” replied Clifford, with quiet firmness, “ not to reply to another question that is proposed. There are some facts of which you are in possession, and the appearance of the witnesses may be said to corroborate one part at least, of the accusation ; but, as to the motives which actuated me, or the means by which I entered the prison, my intention is to maintain a silence that neither argument, entreaty, nor menace, can ever induce me to break !”

This indeed was the course which, from the first moment of reflection, William had determined to pursue. Entirely ignorant of all that had passed with regard to Mirabel, he judged that any interest he displayed in her behalf, any chance word that he might drop, even in

his anxiety to exculpate her, might prove a means, in the hands of his judges, for the ruin of both. Convinced, at the same time, that in one way or another, her energies would be exerted for herself and him, he dreaded by any rash admission, or denial, to overturn any system of policy which she might have found practicable on the occasion. He well knew how expert the French lawyers had ever proved themselves in entangling and perplexing their victims ; and in silence he believed there was the best, the only safeguard against their snares. He was not blind to the probable and terrible consequences ; yet (the proceedings of Mirabel out of the question) there was at all events one subject on which he was resolved never to throw the faintest light, namely, the destination of Dumont ; and such a determination he well knew might be visited with the severest afflictions.

William Clifford was not a man to falter in the career which he had once commenced, and, endeavouring to banish from his mind those

harrowing and unnerving thoughts to which he had so lately been a prey, he now stood boldly forward to meet his fate.

No sooner had he concluded the last speech, than the magistrate glanced from him to the governor, with an air of astonishment, and even of compassion, which neither of those to whom the look was directed, perhaps, believed to be very sincere.

“Young man,” continued the judge, in a low, but distinct and impressive tone, “while there is yet time, do not sacrifice the chance of life to obstinacy and pride. That erring, but repentant creature, whose blind devotion instigated her to become an accomplice——”

William, with difficulty, suppressed the indignation which such a mention of Mirabel de Bernay excited; yet the momentary flash that burst from his eye was not lost upon any of his companions, and the judge proceeded.—

“The Baronne de Bernay, then, for it is needless any longer to conceal a name, alas! but too well known on this fatal occasion, has.

in a private interview granted her by the Duke of Orleans, fully acknowledged her part in the affair, given some clue to the route which the late prisoner was to pursue ; confessed that it was owing to your subtlety alone that she was betrayed into a breach of that duty which she owes to her monarch and her country, and casting herself upon the duke's mercy, has obtained the promise of pardon, for which she so humbly sued. That pardon cannot, however, be ratified, or even secured in any way, until your testimony corroborates the facts which she has stated, and until you have, by your confession, disclosed others, which are even more essential. The course which the baronne has pursued is open to you, it may possibly be attended with like success ; and the first step towards such a proceeding, is to point out clearly the spot in which the late prisoner lies concealed. My secretary will transcribe your confession ; and I myself will instantly return to Paris to inform the regent of your submission, and that you now rely, in

humble hope, upon the effects of his gracious clemency, and await the announcement of his royal pleasure."

"I thank you," replied William, coldly, "for the interest you profess in my behalf; but permit me to say that I doubt, nay, I will venture to contradict, the information you have received with regard to the Baronne de Bernay. Be this as it may, whatever steps that lady has thought fit to take in a matter that so little concerns her, cannot have the slightest influence over my proceedings; and I repeat, once more positively repeat, that I am resolved not to answer another question of any kind whatsoever."

"Not answer another question!" echoed the magistrate, sternly; "are you aware how many significations may be applied to that small word *question*? Question," he again repeated, in a bitter tone, "there are *some questions* which compel replies!" He looked Clifford full in the face as he spoke, while the gaoler and the witnesses exchanged several glances of intelligence. But at that moment the governor strode across the room, and whispered for an

instant to him, on whose word hung the fate of Clifford.

The governor was of no gentle nature. Accustomed for many years to sights of death and deeds of cruelty, and constrained, from the office which he held, to witness daily some dreadful scene, his heart became gradually callous; but he had been a soldier, and there still remained a latent spark of chivalrous feeling in his breast. The manly deportment of the young foreigner, when standing upon the brink of death and torture, had excited his earnest admiration, perhaps, because he fancied his own conduct would have been similar under the same circumstances. He watched Clifford with a vigilant eye; he saw, that the only word which touched him nearly was the name of the woman, whom he doubtless loved! He beheld him in the pride of youth, and saw, flashing out from his noble countenance, all those high feelings which ever find an echo in a soldier's heart. He pictured to himself the prisoner stretched upon the rack, enduring those pangs, of which description can furnish



no idea, and then borne away in the rude arms of the gaoler, with the powerful limbs, and majestic form, reduced to those of a mangled bleeding cripple. He had often witnessed such scenes as these with perfect composure: but he had never experienced a similar interest in any prisoner. The fascination which, under different forms, had at once won upon the regard of De Brissac, and Dumont, of Blanch, and of Mirabel, had worked its way to the obdurate heart of the governor of Vincennes. He conversed with the magistrate, in a low tone, for some moments, apparently urging, arguing, and even entreating, and at length he succeeded, for his companion rose, and, approaching Clifford, he said,

“ In pursuance with the governor’s wishes, you are to be reconducted to your dungeon, there to remain for the space of three hours. During that time you will have opportunity for reflection; and let me earnestly recommend to your notice, that the consequences which must follow your present line of conduct are matter for no light consideration.”

He was then led back to his cell; but a quarter of an hour had not elapsed before the governor again stood by his side, and with many an expression of interest, urged him to avert the fate that menaced him. Clifford was not insensible to the kindly feeling which the officer displayed, even while he resisted every argument in favour of confession. He thanked him warmly, gratefully; he assured him that the knowledge of one human being's sympathy would strengthen him. He owned that the prospect of torture was almost unbearable; but he believed, he trusted, that his conduct would not disgrace him in the dreadful trial. He inquired if it were probable that he would die under the infliction; and earnestly entreated the governor, at all events, to claim possession of the ring which they had taken from his finger, and the broken chain and portrait, which had been concealed in his bosom.

“Save them,” he said, “from the hands of the executioner; and if I die, let them be conveyed to the Baronne de Bernay, with my blessing, and my entreaty that those to whom

they originally belonged will keep them, and value them for my sake."

"You may trust me," replied the governor, feeling some embarrassment under the unusual part which he found himself enacting, "your wishes shall be complied with; and since," he added, with his hand upon the door, "since my advice is thrown away upon you, and that I fear there is no chance of your escaping, tell me if, in any other way compatible with my duty, I can further serve you." Clifford wrung his hand.

"I have but one more wish," he said; "Tell the Baronne de Bernay my memory is in her hands; tell her it is my wish, my last prayer, that she would go to England: she will understand me." He sighed. "I talk as if I were convinced of her safety," he added; "tell me, governor, only one word, do you believe the assertions of the magistrate with regard to that lady?" The governor shook his head, and was silent: Clifford advanced a few steps. "Let me know," he exclaimed, in an appealing tone,

“if but a moment before I die, let me know that she is in safety.”

The governor moved towards the door, but he turned once more, and gazed upon the prisoner with earnest compassion. “Nature did not intend you,” he said at length, “to die so vile a death.”

He left the cell, and William Clifford was again alone. His mind was calmer; the severe and sudden struggle had wrought a more complete victory than he at first dared to hope for, and the unexpected sympathy which the governor evinced, had inclined his heart to gentler feelings. Hope, too, had sprung up, even in the midst of gloom; he believed that the governor would inform him, before it was too late, of the safety of Mirabel, and indeed he could not bring himself to think that the regent would sacrifice that young and lovely girl. She would go to England—she would bear his last gift to Blanch Courtenay, and (if he knew her) she would clear him from every imputation of falsehood and inconstancy, even at the risk of humbling herself in the eyes of a rival.

It was a sad hope, but still it was a hope ; and, in some measure consoled by these reflections, Clifford turned his thoughts to the awful fate, which, in all probability, awaited him—he strove to banish every idea of the possibility of reprieve or pardon—and, earnestly entreating forgiveness for all his errors, he cast himself in humble reliance upon the mercy of Heaven. He remained in prayer until he was reconducted to the hall, where he was met by the magistrate, who had laid aside all the pomp of his former manner, and now spoke in a low and hurried tone, while he pointed with his hand to a door guarded by two sentinels.

“ Are you prepared,” he inquired, “ to make a voluntary confession ?”

“ I have before informed you,” replied Clifford, “ of my determination to be silent !”

The magistrate made a sign to the governor, who, with visible reluctance, gave the word to the sentinels to advance. At the same moment two gaolers stepped forward for the purpose of knocking off the fetters with which Clifford was bound. He stood perfectly still, as if

scarcely observing their occupation ; but it was a dreadful moment ! The magistrate led the way, and the prisoner followed between two guards, his head erect, his step firm, and the fire of his eye unquenched, even though his cheek was pale. The governor watched him to the door, and stood before it, ere he could determine to enter. Indeed, it was the dread alone of being suspected of some connivance at the schemes of the prisoner, that withheld him from absenting himself entirely.

The door was ajar—he heard the fatal preparations—he heard the last exhortation of the magistrate—and the calm, clear reply of the dauntless Clifford. He was ashamed of the emotion which he felt—he listened for every sound, for he knew their indication well, and nothing was now wanting but the signal to begin. It was given—and, at the same moment, a piercing shriek rang through the lofty hall, and echoed round the passages of the prison of Vincennes !

The governor's countenance fell, he did not expect that Clifford's resolution would have so

soon failed; but no! that shriek issued from the other side of the building—that shriek issued from the lips of a woman. A suspicion of the truth, a vague, wild hope, flashed upon his mind, he called to the executioner in a peremptory tone to suspend his operations, and, ere he could gain the opposite door, it was flung open, and Mirabel de Bernay rushed in, followed by several of the inferior officers of the place. Her appearance was that of one deprived of reason—her eye was wild and haggard—her hair hung dishevelled upon her shoulders, and she wore neither cloak nor hood, although the night was cold and wintry. Her lips moved without articulation; but, seizing the governor by one hand, she held up before his eyes a paper bearing the regent's sign and seal, and then, before he could perceive her intention, she darted past into the next room, pushing every one aside until she reached Clifford, just at the moment that his features were recovering from the convulsion which the first infliction of pain had occasioned. Regardless of those who stood around, she knelt by his side, she called

upon him by every fond and endearing name, and bade him live, for she had gained his pardon! With her own hand she strove to free him; and, as each strenuous effort failed, she redoubled her exertions, until the blood streamed from her fair hands, and the colour forced itself back into her cheeks. At first no one in the Chamber of the Question disturbed her, so utterly at a loss were they to know how she had effected her entrance, or with what authority she might be vested.

The magistrate was the first who thought proper to step forward and lay his hand upon her arm, in order to lead her gently away. She sprang up—she shook him off—she stood between him and the prisoner, whose hand she grasped, and glanced around her like the lioness, when guarding the den in which her young lie concealed. At that moment the governor entered the room, having ascertained that the document was authentic, and conversed with the two officers who had escorted Mirabel by command of the Duke of Orleans. But when Clifford was set free, and stood by Mirabel's



side, and took her hand and spoke soothingly to her, she could not yet believe that it was so. The sight of him she loved stretched upon the rack—the over-excitement of her mind during the last week—terror, exhaustion, and agony, had, in fact, produced a temporary insanity; her eye rolled, and her language was wild and incoherent. She continued to menace the bystanders with the wrath of the Duke of Orleans, if William—her William, the only being upon earth she loved, were not instantly released. The governor approached, and spoke gently to her, but she only answered him by wild reproaches for his haste and cruelty. With much difficulty Clifford at length induced her to follow the governor and the two officers into another apartment, and by degrees she became calmer, at least more rational. She understood that he was released, but for some time she watched him, as if believing he must still suffer, although he assured her that the pain he had endured was only momentary; and then she looked around, and remembered where she was and what she had said, and bursting into an

agony of tears, Mirabel hid her face between her hands. After having suffered the first torrent of such feelings to have their course, the governor addressed Clifford, congratulated him upon his pardon, and informed him that his imprisonment would not last much longer; after which, he would be at liberty to quit France. He then requested that Clifford would use his influence with the baronne to leave the prison, as the two officers were intrusted by the regent with her escort to her own chateau, and had strict orders not to defer their return. A few words in a low tone—a hurried blessing—a gentle pressure of the hand—and Mirabel left the prison of Vincennes.

CHAPTER XVI.

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TOGETHER with the full pardon, in authentic form, for Clifford, the governor had received private orders from the regent to detain the prisoner until his further pleasure should be known. Clifford was no longer subjected, indeed, to the hardships which he had undergone on the first day of his detention, but the suspense, which was prolonged from hour to hour, was tantalizing in the extreme. While he remained in Vincennes, all external communication was cut off; and, after the lapse of a fortnight, he began to suspect that the regent had repented of his clemency; but the order for his release arrived at length, and the governor, in strict obedience to the commands, allowed

him to leave the gate of the prison immediately, though it wanted not many hours to nightfall.

Clifford debated for some time in his own mind, if he should run the risk of repairing to Mirabel's chateau at once, impressed as he was with the belief that the Duke of Orleans would gain information of all his proceedings. Nevertheless, as he intended to leave France the next day, he felt that it would be impossible to do so, without taking leave of one to whom he was so deeply indebted. He took his way then in what he believed to be the direction of the baronne's chateau, though he was not much acquainted with the roads in the neighbourhood of Vincennes, and walked on rapidly, giving way to the varying sensations of his mind. The first breath of free air that played upon his brow seemed bliss to one who had looked on a fortnight's captivity as interminable. He gazed around him, and stretched forth his arms, and strode hastily over the ground, as if to convince himself of his freedom. But Clifford's sensations did not merit the name of happiness; his feelings had lately been so severely tried, and

subjected to so many vicissitudes, that they were incapable of that elasticity which had formerly characterized them. It is true that he had now the prospect of being shortly united to Blanch; but that reflection, bound as it was to a thousand memories of difficulties and dangers still to be overcome, had no power, for the moment, to relieve the depression of his spirits.

It was a cold, gray evening, not a ray of sun, which had for many days absented itself, broke through the gloom, and the wintry sound of a low moaning wind swept over the ground. There was at that moment a feeling of insufficiency in Clifford's ever active mind—an involuntary impression of the nothingness of life—a craving for something durable and lasting. His was that mood that comes over the chastened heart, more particularly at the still hour of evening, and seems like a glimpse of the soul's immortality; an indication of higher aspirations to be sought for, than those to which we have fondly looked on earth. While in this train of thought, amid the silence and gloom of a winter evening, a lark sprang sud-

denly up in Clifford's path, and tuned his glad-some notes, higher and higher, till he was lost among the clouds. Thoughtful before, this little incident rendered him doubly so, and he contrasted the lark with his fellow birds—the merry playmates of the infant year. The nightingale, whose sweet song closes with the sweet season; the blackbird, the thrush, the wood-pigeons, all have their own loved time, when the sun is warm, and the trees verdant, and their little melody is answered and echoed from branch to branch by the kindred voices of their tribe; but the lark's gladsome notes is heard at all hours—in all seasons; the wintry aspect of nature, the gloomy colouring of the sky, have no power to check the spirit of his song. His little wings are spread! his little notes are tuned! and upward he soars to the very gates of heaven! Is not the mystery of his undisturbed happiness explained by the direction which it takes?—unlike those other birds, whose joy is dependent upon surrounding objects, he chooses a higher course, he soars above the earth; and perhaps, piercing the heavy clouds which

obscure our view, finds an atmosphere of light beyond!

Such meditations as these occupied Clifford's mind as he left the prison of Vincennes behind, and quickened his pace in hopes of gaining the home of Mirabel before night had closed in. But the way was not so easily found as he at first conceived; and it soon became too dark to distinguish any object that was not close to the path he pursued. Clifford in consequence wandered, it would appear, several miles out of his way, and found no one to direct him excepting a surly peasant, who was more taken up in swearing at his horse's tardiness than in replying to the wayfarer's inquiries. He followed the scanty directions which he received from him, however, and after walking onward for some time, he fancied that he could descry the outline of a large building. Immediately after the cheering aspect of a light, at no very great distance, encouraged him to quicken his pace in that direction. At first he judged that it might proceed from the humble lattice of a cottage, but was soon undeceived by the blaze

became gradually more apparent through the trees. As he approached, the sounds of music reached his ear, borne at intervals upon the wind, now blowing directly from the quarter in which he had seen the light, and Clifford was led to believe that mass was performing in one of those small chapels, which were not unfrequent at that time, by the road-side, particularly in the neighbourhood of any large domain. His supposition was realized as he advanced, by perceiving a profusion of tapers, the light of which streamed through the window and half-open door, as also by the passing to and fro of figures, and the low chant of priests. He approached gently, and entering at the same time with some country-people, who were attracted in a similar manner, stood concealed among them, and had leisure to remark the scene. A moment's observation sufficed to explain the whole:—the little chapel, or oratory, where he now found himself, was hung with black velvet, on which were blazoned innumerable escutcheons, some surmounted by military ensigns, and others by emblems of



mortality. The altar was one blaze of light, which contrasted vividly with the sombre colouring of the walls. Priests were performing the service for the dead; and kneeling before the balustrade, clothed in the deepest mourning, with her form nearly shrouded by an ample veil, appeared a figure, in which Clifford would hardly have recognised Mirabel, had not the attendance of Armand, and the well-known coat of the De Bernays, before assisted him in the discovery.

It was the anniversary of her brother's death, a day more especially dedicated to the memory of him who was, indeed, ever and painfully remembered.

The ceremony concluded, Mirabel rose from her knees, and turning her head, looked towards the gallery under which Clifford stood; she did not see him, but he saw her!—the pallid cheek, the heavy eye, the expression of sadness round that mouth, which once appeared only formed to smile,—the look that told she was older in sorrow than in years!

The baronne's movement was followed by

the sweet tones of young and harmonious voices, that came stealing softly, and swelling gradually into the full harmony of a requiem. One voice, in particular, attracted Clifford's attention; it was not stronger, it was not louder than the rest, but it came from the depths of Mirabel's heart, and could not, therefore, fall unheeded upon William's ear. He had never heard her sing before, but those tones were such as might well vibrate in his ear, unforgotten, through life. The words were well suited to the music, for both were sad, and yet at times there was a burst of melancholy triumph, that accorded perfectly with the subject: both seemed the composition of one, whose heart was too full to measure its outpourings; the metre of the verse was frequently changed, and the music occasionally assumed a wild character, perhaps not very dissimilar from the mood in which it was imagined.

It was, in fact, a lament for the death of a young soldier, who had closed his brief career ere the record of his transient fame was inscribed upon the roll of chivalry;—one who died in the pride

of youth, in the beauty of innocence;—one, who had only enjoyed the morning of life, and was never doomed to watch the coming on of night. His maiden sword had wrought wonders on the field—his charger had been foremost in the encounter—and, when pierced by a thousand wounds, which his valour had provoked, he lay bleeding on the ground—the eye, that was almost glazed, still followed the banner of his country—the heart that was weltering in its gore, still beat with the pulse of patriotism—and the voice, that was faltering from agony, still echoed the shout of victory, or rallied the comrades who trampled upon him as they advanced. Brief, but glorious career! He had only known the joys of earth, and had now exchanged them for those of heaven. Disappointment and sorrow had been unknown to him: his life was a short, but stainless page!

The melody died away in the same gradual manner it had commenced; the priests had already left the altar, the choir had disappeared, and the lights were being extinguished, when Clifford, fearful of exposing Mirabel to any

additional emotion at such a moment, left the chapel, and stood concealed under the shadow of the building, until he saw Armand come out to summon the baronne's carriage. The boy understood him at a word, and making the matter known to Mirabel, received her orders to remain for the purpose of conducting William, on foot, to her chateau. She looked to the spot where he stood, but she did not speak; and Clifford could hear a deep sigh as she entered the carriage. He followed immediately, and many were the questions concerning his mistress, that Clifford asked of the faithful boy, as they hurried on. On the whole, his account was satisfactory: since her last visit to Vincennes she had been calm, Armand said, and although any one who loved her might detect a great change in her appearance, she had never complained of being ill, nor had she, indeed, seemed to be so.

Mirabel preceded them only by a few moments, and she was ascending the staircase, when William and the page joined her. She bade them both follow, and led the way into

a small room, where she usually passed the morning, and where they would be free from all intrusion. She did not speak for some minutes, and the contrast of her manner with what it formerly had been, was so striking as to remind Clifford forcibly of the sketch which Stanley had originally given him of the waywardness of her character. She seated herself at length, and in a voice that betrayed more of what was passing within than the words which she uttered, said,

“It would not be expedient either for your sake or my own, that you should remain any time under my roof; although you well know the pleasure it must ever afford me——.” She could not pursue the constrained style which she had chosen, and added, more in her usual manner, but yet with evident restraint,

“Were the regent to discover that we had again met, his anger might lead him to cancel the favour which he reluctantly granted. You must not be found upon the shores of France after to-morrow: I have provided for your departure by the best means in my power, though

latterly, as you may believe, there has been little time or opportunity for arrangement of any kind. Armand will conduct you to the house of one of my tenants, where you may pass the night in perfect ease and security; and in the morning he will be your guide to the coast, where the same vessel now lies in which he, for whom we both have risked so much, crossed the Channel. Do not think all these precautions unnecessary; acquainted, as I am, with the character of the Duke of Orleans, my advice is that you should intrude yourself as little as possible upon his notice, and that the next thing he hears concerning you should be your safe arrival in England."

There was something so foreign in her tone and manner from the usual current of her feelings, that it inspired Clifford with a sensation of profound melancholy.

"When I turned my steps," he said, "in the direction of your chateau, I felt that were it known, I might compromise your safety as well as my own; but you must forgive me, the idea of leaving France without bidding you

farewell—you to whom I owe every thing—I could not do it, and you, Mirabel, you would not have wished it?”

“Alas, no!” she replied, in her own sweet voice, for those few words had banished all her assumed indifference, “Heaven knows what a wretched and weary time I have passed since that dreadful night at Vincennes! I was not informed of the day you were to be set at liberty, and did not dare to ask; sometimes I believed you were gone, and sometimes I tried to wish you were—but that was impossible. Oh, no! William, I bless you for this; it will be something to remember when you are away. This room,” she added, in a low tone, as if speaking to herself, “this room will be hallowed to me now.”

Again she checked herself, and bade Armand hastily bring some refreshments, and make every preparation for immediate departure.

They sat opposite each other for several moments, in perfect silence; the silence of the lips alone, for well did they know all that was passing in the other's mind. What a host of

feelings were concentrated in the short interval that elapsed during the absence of Armand ! What a contrast did the outward demeanour of those two companions present to the perturbed state of their hearts !

They never raised their eyes, or stirred from one position, until William, feeling that every moment rendered the silence more distressing, rose, and taking the baronne's hand, lifted it tenderly, but respectfully, to his lips.

"Mirabel," he said, "we are about to part, will you not assure me of your forgiveness before we do so? Sorrow and danger have I brought upon you, who, in return, have given me life, liberty, and —— !"

He was about to add, happiness, but the word seemed ill-placed at such a moment.

"Mirabel, you do not answer me ; you turn away your head ; am I then lowered in your estimation ?"

"William," she replied, "do not, for mercy's sake, speak to me in this manner ! I had fancied—I had believed—I could have stood this trial better. Do not prolong it—leave me



soon; I shall not have the power to tell you when.—Good God! to think that we shall never, never meet again!”

She passed her hand over her eyes, but recovered herself upon the entrance of Armand, and urged Clifford to take some refreshment, while she gave a few additional orders to her faithful page. She charged him with a message to the master of the vessel, and desired that his brother, the boy who had accompanied Dumont, should go with them to England, in order to keep him out of the way a little longer.

The baronne then relapsed into silence, and there was another pause more painful than the first. The page whispered a few words to Clifford, who once more rose, and pressed the hand of Mirabel. They did not speak. William quitted the room first; Armand lingered for one moment to receive some final order,—and then Mirabel de Bernay was alone!

CHAPTER XVII.

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IN order to prosecute our narrative, which is drawing speedily to a close, we must transport our reader to a small village on the coast of England.

It was at an early hour in the morning that a stranger appeared on the beach, and made many inquiries relative to a small vessel that was riding at anchor, as near the shore as she could approach with safety. The inhabitants of the village, consisting of some dozen fishermen, and their families, gathered eagerly round the stranger to give him all the information, perhaps more than he required. The vessel was pitching and tossing with the equinoctial gales, howling round her shrouds, in a terrific manner.

“ She’s a French craft,” said one man, “ by her rig ; but from what part of the coast I can’t say, for it’s easy to see she’s a stranger to our waters.”

“ There’s more captains than one aboard,” exclaimed another, “ if my glass tells truth ; there’s a young man that walks up and down deck, and points first to the shore and then to the boat, as if there was a possibility of her living in such a sea as this !”

“ He’ll have his way in the end,” observed a third ; “ I’ve a notion he’s somebody of consequence, with his page there beside him, and another forward, that wears the same livery.”

“ If it’s him that I take him for,” said a woman, who had contented herself with looking intelligent for some time past, “ it’s no wonder that he wishes to land and be off again before it’s known.”

“ You talk nonsense, wife,” exclaimed the first speaker ; “ you can’t suppose the chevalier would run his head into the fire again so soon for nothing ; why there a’nt a handful of men aboard.”

“I mentioned no names,” replied the woman, “but whoever or whatever he may be, he’s some strange wish for coming ashore immediately, and that I know as well as if I could hear him say so.”

During the preceding conversation, the stranger, who is better known to us by the name of Dumont, stood with his arms folded, and his eye fixed upon the ship, with an expression of intense anxiety. No sooner had the woman concluded her speech, than he turned suddenly round, and proposed to her husband to take him alongside the vessel.

The man looked not a little surprised, and refused in the most decided manner; but Dumont continued:

“When I first came down upon the beach my good friend,” he said, “you were descanting upon the merits and exploits of your own boat, and even my inexperienced eye can discern that she is far stronger, and better constructed, than the one belonging to the ship, which they appear to me to be in the act of lowering at this moment. I have no doubt we shall reach

the vessel, and return in perfect safety, and you shall name your own sum for doing so. There are those on board who are very dear to me; and one word from my lips would deter that young man (of whom you spoke just now) from exposing himself to unnecessary danger."

"And there are those on shore," replied the fisherman, looking down at his young wife, who had stolen round from the other side, and now clung closely to his arm, "there are those on shore, d'ye see, sir, that I may say are dear to me. I've known the day when you shouldn't have asked me twice: but things are different now. It's my belief that such a sea as this would swamp any boat—but they're determined to try it however."

As he spoke, all eyes were again turned towards the sea, for there could no longer exist a doubt of the determination which the people on board the vessel had come to. Three passengers were seen descending the ship's side, while only two sailors followed their example, and that with apparent reluctance. They had gained nothing by the delay, for at this moment

the storm raged with increased fury ; the breakers were fearfully high, and the dark and threatening clouds appeared to frown upon so rash an undertaking. The group on the beach became doubly anxious ; Dumont advanced closer to the sea-side, and the fisherman whispered a few words in his wife's ear.

“ I hope not,” she said, “ I hope there'll be no necessity. I've watched you home in as bad a storm as this ; but I'm sorry from my heart for that gentleman, for I know what his feelings must be.”

They were again silent, as they watched the little skiff, which struggled gallantly for some time, now rising on the crest of a tremendous wave, now hid in the hollow ; one moment thrown forward with such violence as nearly to reach the shore, the next carried back again by the sweeping retrograde motion, even further than before. At length it appeared as if a hundred waves had contributed to swell the liquid mountain, which rolled towards the boat, and with a low murmuring sound, seemed to menace her with more than usual fury. It was

a breathless moment, many a stern and even weatherbeaten countenance betrayed signs of real alarm, as their experience enabled them to calculate to a nicety the risk which the French boat ran. She was hid to their view for a longer time than before, and, on reappearing, their worst fears were realized, for her keel was uppermost! The sailors were seen struggling back towards the vessel, which they regained in safety: the young man, who had been the subject of so much conversation, was swimming strongly for the shore, evidently making strong efforts to support one of his companions, whose exertions appeared most feeble, and who slipped from his grasp, and sunk, when within fifty yards of the shore.

Dumont had instantly leaped into one of the boats, which lay upon the water's edge, and the fisherman, extricating himself with some difficulty from his wife's grasp, hastened to join him. By this time another boat had put off, and quickly succeeded in rescuing one of the pages, but, unfortunately, in so doing, she struck the

head of the other, who, with uplifted hands, was just rising to the surface. The next boat, in which was Dumont, followed so swiftly, as to enable him to catch a glimpse of, and to grasp, the sufferer's form. He lifted it into the boat, and regained the shore in safety, where by this time stood, in security, the two other passengers who had so narrowly escaped death, a fate which appeared to have befallen their companion, who lay pale and motionless in the arms of the Frenchman.

The people gathered round Dumont with mingled curiosity and compassion, but he motioned them aside with a look of stern authority, and addressing the young man, by the name of Clifford, bade him follow quickly. Bending over his senseless burden, with his hand placed upon the left side, to discover if the heart still beat, Dumont made but few strides between the sea-side and the cottage of the fisherman's wife, where he gently deposited his precious charge upon her homely bed. William Clifford and the boy, Armand, stood beside him, with



several of the people who had followed, and now gazed in speechless apprehension upon a sight at once strange and beautiful.

The sufferer was clad in a garb resembling that of the other page, though of more costly materials; but the delicacy of the complexion, the diminutive size of the limbs, and the long black hair, now dripping with salt water, which hung in wild profusion; the hat under which it had been concealed having fallen off in the sea—all seemed at variance with the masculine attire.

William Clifford leaned over the pillow, and gazed upon the lovely, though inanimate form with feelings of bitter grief.

“I had long suspected this,” he said, “but did not dare believe it. O God! she is dying, Dumont; will no one tell me how to save her!”

He took her hand, he chafed it between his own; while the woman, who well knew how to act in such an emergency, assisted him, and they at length succeeded in restoring animation. A slight shudder gave evidence that life was not extinct; and after a painful struggle, Mira-

bel De Bernay opened her eyes, with a bewildered gaze, and alarmed at the number of unfamiliar faces which she beheld, closed them again.

Dumont and Clifford made signs to the people to retire, which they did with some reluctance, only leaving the mistress of the house with the strangers. Armand kneeled by the bedside, took Mirabel's hand gently, and, as he did so she again opened her eyes, but scarcely appeared to recognise him. She moved her lips several times without uttering any distinct sound. When she succeeded, her voice was earnest though feeble.

"William—" she said, "I do not see—tell me, for God's sake, where is he?"

"Here," he replied, at the same time removing the long wet hair from her face and forehead; "I am here, close to you; there is no one lost; and you, Mirabel, you are recovering now!"

"Oh, no!" she replied, faintly, "I shall never recover. I did not mean, William, that you should know me, and for that reason I avoided speaking to you, or approaching you,

during our passage. It was an idle wish, but I had set my heart on seeing *her*; and I believed I might do so without being discovered."

"Pray do not speak any more at present," exclaimed William, alarmed at the feeble sound of her voice; "indeed, Mirabel, warmth and quiet may yet restore you."

"Oh, no!" she said, "I have too much pain here."

She raised her hand to her head, and to Clifford's horror, he saw that her fingers were covered with blood.

The woman now interfered, entreating that they would go and call some one who was capable of examining the wound; and allow her in the mean time, to get the poor thing to bed.

Mirabel looked earnestly at William. "I beg of you," she said, "I would insist if I had strength to do so, that you will call no one,—that you will not leave me. It will all be over soon; and why should my latest moments be disturbed for no use. It would only hurry the

moment that is fast approaching, and render it doubly bitter. Listen to me, William, for I am dying, and I once said I should love to die thus—and you, too, Armand, my good, my faithful Armand, listen to one who will never make you another request, or cost you another pang.”

As she spoke, Dumont moved slowly to the foot of the bed, and the poor woman, gazed upon them all with tears in her eyes, though she understood not the language in which they spoke. Mirabel continued,

“Come nearer, William—both of you—for it is an exertion to speak. I promised the regent that I would await his summons for Mademoiselle de Valois’s marriage at my chateau, in Normandy. I must be conveyed there, Armand. When his highness sends for me—you will show them where I lie—in Gaspard’s monument. Stay, one more request—let my brother’s sword be buried in my coffin, Armand, and the scarf that hangs beside it. That is the only thing I possess, which once belonged to you, William. Oh! my God, I am dying—I am at peace with all, but my thoughts are too much set on earthly

things!—Armand, restrain your tears—the grief of Gaspard’s brother should be more manly. William, let that poor boy live with you for a few years,—until he be more fitted to struggle with the trials and sorrows of the world. He will be no burden to any one: at Vincennes I have left my will—the chateau there I bequeath to Armand, with the care of my poor Sable—my poor, faithful dog. The rest of my property is left to Blanch Courtenay. How faint my heart grows!—I felt I should never return to France.”

Clifford was deeply afflicted;—“Oh! Mirabel,” he said, taking her hand within his own, “would to God that the forfeit of my life could save yours. It was your gift—and, oh! how willingly would I now relinquish it.”

“Do not say so,” she replied, “for your life is dear to others beside yourself” — she sighed deeply. “Tell me,” she continued, in a rambling manner, “was it a dream, William, or did I see the prisoner from Vincennes?”

Clifford made a sign to Dumont, who advanced to Mirabel’s side. She looked at him

as if a thousand associations had been awakened by his presence.

“ I can sympathize with you now,” she said, “ though you told me that I could not when last we met. In a few moments, my spirit will obtain its freedom,—for this world has been little else than a prison-house to me !”

Dumont strove to speak, but he could not,—a single tear, the first, the last—he was ever to shed, trembled in his eye ; and he who had encountered danger and captivity, with stern composure, stood unnerved by the deathbed of a woman.

Mirabel smiled sweetly on him, and then she turned once more to Clifford.

“ I am dying, William,” she said, “ oh ! do not look at me thus, lest you make life too dear, and trouble my thoughts, that should be fixed on high. In this moment of separation, my heart overflows with tenderness for all mankind, and with forgiveness for those who have ever sought to injure me ;—I bless the regent, whose mercy spared your life,—and you, my faithful, my afflicted Armand—and her you

love, William, who will perhaps shed a tear on Mirabel's tomb, when she hears what I have been to you. William, dearest—best beloved—our creeds are not the same, but true piety has a common language; let me hear some words of solace, in that voice which will soon be hushed for me.”

William complied, in a low and murmuring tone: he spoke of future happiness; of eternal rewards; of the possibility of reunion, in a world that knows no change.

Her full bright eye once more beamed with enthusiasm. Taking Armand's hand, and pressing that of Clifford to her heart, while she raised a glance upon Dumont that appeared to claim his sympathy also, “Why should I grieve?” she said; “my life has not been sinful, and my heart has been awakened. I die in humble, earnest hope of that happiness which Gaspard now enjoys. A brother must be a sweet welcomer at the gates of heaven. Farewell! God bless you both—God bless you all!”

For several moments her eyes rested on

William :—"Raise my head," she murmured at length, "for my breath is failing!"

She leaned her head upon his shoulder, and William in that last hour pressed his lips to her cold and deathlike forehead. A smile that seemed to partake of beatitude stole over her features.

In another moment, a loud and piercing cry from the boy Armand brought the inmates of the cottage to their side, and told them that another immortal spirit had taken flight to that world "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest."



CHAPTER XVIII.

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THE vicissitude of feeling to which Blanch had lately been subjected,—the shame which her parents' conduct had excited,—and the fluctuating state of hope and fear, in which the uncertainty of William's safety placed her, preyed upon her health, and alarmed Lady Courtenay for that life, which she had not scrupled to render miserable. When she sat by her daughter's bedside, and watched the rapid progress of fever, and listened in horror to the first incoherent murmurs that announced the coming on of delirium, then the remorse which her husband's reasoning had silenced, took entire possession of her mind. Calling Sir Philip to witness the melancholy state of their daugh-

ter, they exchanged many a glance of terror, many an exclamation of repentance, as they deduced from her wild ravings that the treatment she had received was the cause of her dangerous illness. There were allusions to prison, and to Dumont, which were incomprehensible to Sir Philip; but when he heard the entreaties which Blanch addressed in the height of her fever to Lord Dalmaine, to forgive the unworthy deceptions her father had exercised on both; when he listened with painful eagerness to the gentle condemnations of his own child, coupled with excuses and apologies for his conduct, then the guilty man trembled; for he knew that his hypocrisy and falsehood had been discovered.

During her illness Lord Dalmaine displayed much tender interest in her recovery, while he generously laboured for her happiness in the event of her restoration to health. To Sir Philip, however, his demeanour was cold and haughty in the extreme; while, on the other hand, the confusion of the baronet's manner bespoke that humiliation which the discovery

of his duplicity naturally produced, and of which Dalmaine at length thought fit to take advantage, by demanding his consent to Blanch's union with her former lover. This proposal was immediately agreed to, when coupled with the implied threat of informing the king of the other affair in case of denial, and Sir Philip was obliged to give his unwilling consent, without being made aware of those circumstances which would have removed every scruple from his worldly mind.

Care and kindness, with the increasing mildness of the weather, worked favourably together for the recovery of Blanch; but it was some time before she was permitted to receive the visits of any one, or to breathe the open air. One of her first wishes was to see Dalmaine; but, ignorant of all that had passed during her illness, she did not think proper to make the request herself. The alteration of her parents' demeanour, and that of her father in particular, struck her most forcibly. He seemed a different person in language and manner; but this might perhaps be accounted

for by the anxiety which her danger had caused.

Lady Courtenay never left her daughter's side. The recollection that she had been on the verge of the grave endeared Blanch a hundred fold, and no influence could now have persuaded her to one act, even of passive unkindness. She shaped her conversation according to her idea of Blanch's taste, carrying her back to the days of her childhood, and the description of their early home. But when her daughter was pronounced convalescent, and the physicians suggested that in a few days the air would strengthen and refresh her, then Lady Courtenay had much to say, and the contents of many letters to read aloud.

"Here is one, dearest Blanch," she said, smiling, "that will amuse as well as interest you. It is from your aunt, Mrs. Roland Stanley. I should like you to hear the enthusiastic expression of her happiness, in having at last found a person exactly suited to her in every possible way, excepting, as Philip observes, in money and in years, both of which your aunt

possesses in greater quantities! As far as I can judge, I think she has done wisely."

"It is singular," replied Blanch, smiling, as her mother concluded the *ci-devant* Madame D'Aubry's letter. "Nothing could be more likely, and yet the possibility of such an event never entered my head."

"I hear, also," continued Lady Courtenay, "a fact that none of us discovered when he was here, that Mr. Stanley is a furious Jacobite; and though your aunt wisely refrains from mentioning the circumstance, her sudden conversion to the Stuart cause I am told is most remarkable. Nay, my informer assures me, that she lives in an atmosphere of white roses. You must write to her, dear child, in a few days, when you are stronger. His majesty has been most gracious in his inquiries respecting you—indeed, all your friends have evinced much anxiety. The court has lately been unusually gay, and all the ladies, including Miss Bellenden, are losing their hearts to a handsome young nobleman, who has just returned from his travels. Lord Dalmaine and

he are inseparable; and, I am told, he boasts of being an old acquaintance of yours. I have not often seen him, but your father tells me that Lord Raby inquires most tenderly after our dear Blanch."

"Lord Raby," echoed her daughter, listlessly, "I never heard the name before."

"Possibly he may have succeeded to the title since you met," replied Lady Courtenay, with a smile, and the subject was changed, by the entrance of Sir Philip.

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During the chances and changes which befel the actors in our little narrative, since first the curtain was raised upon their proceedings, the great machinery of nature had rolled on, according to that wise course which Almighty Wisdom has prescribed. The storm raged, the sweet rain fell, the flowers sprang to life and again faded before the blast of autumn, or the snows of winter, and all without relation to the joys or sorrows of men.

When first we became acquainted with the fair girl whose danger we have just recorded, it

was then in the childhood of the year, and that year had proceeded in its course, like many a lovely but hapless daughter of clay, in lands where our religion exists under another form. Bursting into life and beauty, her early path strewn with the blossoms of hope and promise, she goes forward rejoicing ;—the summer comes, her mental and personal charms are more matured, she appears at the summit of earthly prosperity. But, lo ! the autumn of disappointment is at hand, and the gradual decay of every surrounding joy, induces her to relinquish a world that has already lost its charms. Then she assumes her most gorgeous robes, and decks herself in the choicest ornaments, to appear, for the last time, resplendent with beauty, in such a variegated dress as the autumnal tints present to our view, previous to being shrouded in the vestal snows of her winter veil ! Such had been the fate of that year, with some of whose events we have been occupied ; and, now the same part was to be enacted by its successor.

Several months had already elapsed, and the merry spring-tide had early commenced its

pleasant reign. It was a warm, bright, sunny morning when Blanch mounted her horse and rode slowly in the direction of the Home Park, by her father's side. The king, and the whole of the court had set forward at an early hour, to enjoy the diversion of a stag hunt; and Sir Philip proposed to his daughter, to join the royal party a short time before their return, a plan to which she gladly acceded. The hope of learning something conclusive from Dalmaine, was predominant in her mind, and, although during the interval of her illness, many distressing events might have occurred, Blanch felt a buoyancy of spirits for which she could scarcely account. Perhaps it was the natural consequence of her recovery, or the smiling face of nature that welcomed her as a friend; perhaps the melody of the birds who were trying their songs of love and joy; or the jocund voice of the cuckoo, the herald of her favourite season.

They proceeded through the gardens, which were now assuming their variegated dress, while the butterfly had already commenced his giddy



sportive round, frequently blending his own brilliant hues with those of the flower on which he settled, and, before the eye had detected the deception, starting forth again upon the wing, as if in mockery of the eye he had cheated. The monotonous hum of the bee might be heard pursuing the same track with diligence and success, as diving deeper into the heart of the flower than his heedless and superficial forerunner, he extracted that sweetness which had escaped the notice of him who was content to play upon the surface. The clustering lilac mingled its blossoms with the golden shower of the laburnum in graceful fellowship, like twin children of the early spring, while the chestnut avenues were studded with their flowery cones, and the faint, though not insipid perfume of the hawthorn was borne far and wide by the breath of morning. Hope unfurled her verdant banner; every tree and shrub were decked in her own livery; and even that dark and gloomy tree which is so often coupled with the thought of death, and sorrow, put forth

shoots of tender green, as if emulating the brightness around, and offering an image of that holy solace which is sometimes permitted to spring up in the heart of man, even in the midst of earthly despair.

The riders crossed the little rustic bridge, and entered the park, while the canal by which it is divided into two portions glittered like a sheet of liquid fire. Here and there were groups of startled deer, elevating their graceful heads to guard against surprise, and bounding off in terror at every movement of their own companions.

As Blanch entered the gate, a considerable herd, that had taken shelter under the avenue, alarmed by her sudden appearance, plunged into the stream, and swam rapidly to the other side, disturbing the still waters, and dashing them in golden ripples on the shore.

“I can see them,” said Sir Philip; “I can recognise his majesty from this distance; put your horse into a canter, Blanch, and we shall be up with them in a moment.”

She did so, and galloping across the turf, they reached the spot at the very moment the stag was brought to the ground by two dogs.

It was a gay sight, for the huntsmen wore their gorgeous liveries, and the courtiers and ladies, well mounted and magnificently dressed, were disposed in a group round the royal person, and at this moment every head, save that of George the First, was uncovered.

Sir Philip rode up, followed by Blanch, whom the king congratulated upon her recovery, as did every one present, in heartfelt terms. But she could not speak; she could not thank them; and even his majesty's gracious reception only elicited a silent inclination of the head,—for by the side of Lord Dalmaine, with his eye fixed upon her, rode William Clifford!

He was clothed in deep mourning, and was followed by a boy in the garb of a page, whose melancholy countenance, and sable dress, formed a sad contrast to the smiling faces and gay attire by which he was surrounded.

“We have forgot, Sir Philip,” exclaimed his

majesty, with a smile of intelligence, and in the best English he could command, “your daughter is not acquainted with our newly-gained and faithful subject, the Earl of Raby!”

Blanch looked at the speaker in joyful astonishment, and perceived by his countenance, and that of all present, that the understanding was general.

The generous hearted Dalmaine, to whose exertions Clifford’s success was owing, looked on with a mingled sensation of pleasure and of sorrow. He watched the look of silent ecstasy, and while glorying in the thought that he had proved instrumental in restoring Blanch to happiness, he averted his head, lest he should again witness a glance which had never, which could never now, be bent on him.

In another moment William was at her side—in another moment her eye rested upon that form on which memory had so long dwelt, and her ear imbibed the music of that voice for which she had so long listened.

The rapture of that moment could only be conveyed to the imagination by the silence

which they maintained. There are no words for the fulness of joy : the torrent that is dashed from rock to rock with a thousand obstacles to impede its progress, a thousand hinderances to resist and thwart its natural tendency, presents us with a more fruitful imagery than the calm and tranquil lake, on whose bosom is reflected with faithful similarity, the blessed colouring of heaven, and the calm beauty of nature in repose.

“My dear Blanch !” exclaimed Miss Bellen-den, archly, as she rode up by her side a few moments before they reached the palace, “when I next write to Paris, what message shall I deliver to my cousin ?”

“Tell him, dear Mary,” replied her friend, placing her hand as she spoke within Clifford’s, “tell him merely these words—‘*Qui bien aime, tard oublie !*’”

## CONCLUSION.

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THOSE who visited Normandy in the year 1721, speak in enthusiastic admiration of a masterwork of art, adorning the chapel of an ancient chateau in that province. It is a monument from the chisel of Roubilliac, consisting of a male and female figure, of singular beauty, whose features bear a striking resemblance.

The larger figure is represented as a guardian angel, who, by the skill of the sculptor, is made to appear actually hovering in the air, while he receives in his arms the almost senseless form of a lovely young woman.

She is apparently rising from the sea; and her clinging garments, and long dishevelled

hair, seem heavy and dripping with the element that overwhelmed her.

There is a glance of recognition in both countenances; but bearing a different character, in the sublimer expression of the spirit, and the languid eye of the dying.

The tablet below bears the following inscription:

THIS MONUMENT  
was erected by  
WILLIAM EARL OF RABY,  
and  
BLANCH HIS WIFE,  
to the Memory  
of  
A BROTHER AND SISTER,  
the last hereditary possessors  
of this Castle,  
and the last representatives of a line  
of Noble Ancestry.

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It was said by one of old,  
“The sweetest flowers are fittest for  
the bosom of God.”

At the time of which we are speaking, the castle was inhabited by a man of retired and eccentric habits, who was supposed to have once mixed in the world of war and politics,

but was now devoted to a life of comparative seclusion. It was whispered that he did not care to show himself at Paris during the regent's lifetime, while others positively affirmed, that the Duke of Orleans desired nothing better than the prosperity of a man who had once been his friend.

The English owners of the castle occasionally visited their Norman possessions, and many a thought of by-gone years was awakened by the sight of that tomb. Nor could the jealous Armand fail to confess, that Lady Raby's patience was never wearied by his fond reminiscences, or her sympathy denied to his passionate regret for the death of Mirabel de Bernay.

FINIS.









